



2022 Older Adult Needs Assessment



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On the cover: Bill Harrison enjoys a meal during the Kosher Congregate Lunch Program at the Jewish Community Center in Denver.

Introduction

As part of its commitment to serving older adults in the Denver metro and Boulder regions, Jewish Family Service of Colorado (JFS) conducted a needs assessment for people ages 55 and older in 2022. The Colorado Health Institute (CHI) was contracted to lead this analysis.

This report contains 12 strategies and supporting recommendations identified by CHI based on its data analysis and community engagement. These strategies and recommendations will support JFS and other local stakeholders who aim to help older adults and their families access the services they need and want.

JFS recognizes that older adults are not a monolith. Their needs and preferences vary by age, culture, language, community, race, and sexual identity. The findings in this report are informed by data, resources, and insights from different perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds in the aging and long-term care system. Quotes included throughout the report come from survey respondents, focus group participants, and key informants.

Background

JFS's Aging Care and Connections department primarily serves adults 55 and older, which is how this report defines older adults unless otherwise specified. This includes people across all stages of life. Some are parents of high schoolers. Others are great-grandparents. Many are in the workforce, while others are retirees. Some are in long-term or hospice care.

About 850,000 older adults live in the Denver metro area, defined in this report as Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson counties. This population increased 40% from 2010 to 2020 and is projected to grow an additional 25% by 2030.¹

A Note from JFS

Jewish Family Service of Colorado welcomes other organizations in the Denver metro aging community to review and implement the recommendations and strategies outlined in this report. Our goal is to inform aging services organizations of the needs in the older adult community to foster collaboration and ensure the development and deployment of resources and programming across the sector.

In May 2022, CHI surveyed 175 older adults in the Denver metro area. Most (58%) said they felt prepared to age in their community. However, many said available services are not accessible to or inclusive of everyone.

In some cases, services to support older adults and their care partners already exist. Yet local organizations that serve older adults say many are not aware of these options. Service costs, workforce shortages, and communication challenges are also common barriers to offering services. In the Denver Regional Council of Government (DRCOG)'s service area — Adams, Arapahoe, Broomfield, Clear Creek, Denver, Douglas, Gilpin, and Jefferson counties — almost half (47%) of adults 60 and older said the services provided to older adults in their community were fair or poor.

Effective and actionable policies to improve access to and awareness of services for older adults and their care partners in the region are urgently needed.



“[There is a] need to address senior needs across a wide continuum of needs due to age, health, finances, cultures, language, etc.” — Older adult

Methods

With an older adult population that is growing and becoming more diverse, JFS asked CHI to conduct an assessment answering the following questions:

1. To what extent is JFS reaching the older adult population in metro Denver?
2. What services should JFS consider introducing to better meet the needs of older adults in the metro Denver region?
3. What service delivery approaches might JFS consider implementing to ensure metro Denver clients and community members can access services in convenient, accessible, and authentic ways? Are there environments outside of senior centers that are ripe for providing services?

CHI combined the following quantitative and qualitative research approaches to answer these questions:

- **Analyzed data** from sources including the Colorado Health Access Survey, the American Community Survey, and the Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults to provide insight into older adult population trends.
- Completed a **literature review** of 25 older adult needs assessments and over 30 articles that identified community health and service challenges in the aging and long-term care space.
- Fielded a 12-question **community survey** of 175 older adults, including current JFS clients in May 2022. Survey participants were ages 55 and older and lived in the JFS service region of Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson counties. The survey identified older adults' needs and barriers to getting services.
- Conducted nine **key informant interviews** between May 2 and June 15, 2022, to better understand how these barriers might be addressed. See Appendix for a complete list of interviewees.
- Held two **focus groups** to provide additional nuance to survey results and other community data. The first, conducted via online video conference on May 18, 2022, included eight older adults and care partners in the Denver metro area. The second, conducted in-person on June 24, 2022, included 27 current JFS clients.

- Conducted a **capacity analysis** to examine the current supply of 14 key services identified in the survey, interviews, and focus groups. Thirty-six organizations throughout the Denver metro and Boulder areas offered insight into whether sufficient services exist to meet demand.
- Finally, an **advisory group** offered expertise and interpretation throughout the assessment. Advisory group members were selected by JFS and CHI based on experience, expertise, and position. See Appendix for a complete membership list.

Using these inputs, CHI and the advisory group identified 12 strategies for JFS and other organizations that seek to serve the older adult population in the Denver metro area. Each strategy described in this report is accompanied by recommended next steps and additional supporting information where applicable.

The first eight strategies primarily apply to JFS, while the last four are recommendations for the broader Denver metro aging community. However, these broader strategies address systemic challenges and will benefit from coordination among JFS, key stakeholders, and local and state leaders.

The Social Determinants of Health and Aging

Social determinants of health are social, economic, and environmental factors that affect a person's ability to engage in healthy behaviors and to access needed services. The social determinants of health influence whether and how people are able to access nutritious food, receive timely and affordable health care, or exercise. Although this report does not provide recommendations specific to the social determinants of health, JFS and CHI recognize that many of the challenges documented below are rooted in social inequity and require system-level changes.

Strategies and Recommendations

Strategy 1. Expand existing services to meet regional demand.

Challenge. CHI's capacity analysis found that there are too few case management, food delivery, in-home personal care and homemaker services, and handyman services to meet the demand among older adults.

Older adults with fixed or low incomes rely on free or low-cost services to support independent living in their homes and communities. About three in four adults 50 and older (77%) want to age at home or in their community long term, according to a [2021 AARP survey](#). However, long-term care services, housing repairs and taxes, and healthy food can be financially out of reach for many. About 10% of older adults in the region have incomes at or below 138% of the Federal Poverty Level (about \$25,000 annually for a family for two).³

- 1. Case management.** Very few free or low-cost case management services are available in the region. Most providers have waitlists that range from two weeks to five months. Case managers provide person-centered care to older adults and their families by assisting with referrals to local social and health providers, planning for long-term care, and ensuring they are receiving the care they need regardless of their health, social, or financial situation.
- 2. Food delivery.** Unlike food assistance and pantry services, food delivery options for older adults are limited in the Denver metro region. Around 17,000 older adults in the region experienced food insecurity in 2021, according to the 2021 Colorado Health Access Survey. Additionally, 46% of older adults in DRCOG's service region said access to affordable, quality food in their community was fair or poor. Yet with the exception of Boulder County, service providers in the region reported waitlists for these services. In addition to waitlists, older adults said it's hard to find delivery services that are not strictly for those who are medically homebound or have severe or terminal illnesses.



Volunteer Tim Hoops loads items into his vehicle as part of the JFS food pantry delivery service.

3. **Personal care/homemaker services.** In-home personal care and homemaker services provide adults and their care partners with housekeeping, meal preparation, and other independent living supports. However, most personal care and homemaker services are expensive. Homemaker services for eight hours a week in Colorado cost about \$14,000 a year.⁴ Organizations that offer free or low-cost services have waitlists of up to a year.
4. **Handyperson services.** Most handyperson service providers tend to have waitlists that are several weeks long.

Recommendation 1a.

Expand case management, food delivery, and homemaker services at JFS.

- **Next steps.** Create budgets to assess direct and indirect costs of expanding current programs.

Recommendation 1b.

Consider offering, providing vouchers for, or contracting with a local handyperson or home repair organization to expedite referrals for home and yard repair needs.

- **Next steps.** Conduct a cost and capacity assessment to inform whether JFS would like to provide handyperson services in-house or contract with a local organization.
- **Supporting information.** Potential organizations to contract with include Ace Senior services, Brothers Redevelopment, Home Builders Foundation, Volunteers of America Colorado, and Extreme Community Makeover.



“I need legal planning services and handyman services, but I cannot afford them and do not know where to go.”

— Older adult

Strategy 2.

Strengthen service awareness and resource navigation opportunities among older adults, their care partners, and their families.

Challenge. Identifying and connecting to resources and services is challenging for older adults, their families, and their care partners. Community members said it is hard to find eligibility, cost, and waitlist information on services.

According to the 2018 Community Assessment Survey of Older Adults, about three in five Denver-area older adults were unsure what services were available in their community. More than a third of participants in this project’s community survey said they did not access the services they needed because of awareness challenges. Additionally, older adults’ care partners need better access to information and services that support their own physical, mental, and economic well-being.

CHI’s capacity analysis found that the seven most in-demand services in the Denver metro region have the capacity and availability, but older adults and care partners are often not aware of their availability:

1. **Food assistance and pantries.** The Denver metro area has dozens of food pantries available to the public with no waitlists, but barriers to accessing these facilities — such as transportation or limited hours of operation — were commonly reported.
2. **Gym and fitness programs.** Several gym and fitness classes are available with no waitlists across the region. In some counties, such as Denver, adults 60 and older are eligible for free gym memberships. (Service providers did note that there are sometimes too few classes specific to older adults and there is a growing interest in recreation services being offered in-person at older adult housing and care facilities.)
3. **Volunteering opportunities.** Many organizations need more volunteers and accept people of all ages and backgrounds. Available volunteering opportunities offer a wide range of topics or service types.



Volunteer Kathy Sabine prepares boxes of food at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Food Pantry in Denver.

- 4. Social and community events.** Existing social and community events have capacity to welcome additional older adults. Service providers reported that there can always be more social events and opportunities to cater to older adults' diverse interests and backgrounds.
- 5. Financial assistance and planning.** Older adults want assistance navigating financial topics such as pre/post retirement savings, rental and mortgage cash assistance, resource navigation, and asset transferring. Only a few organizations offer these services free of cost and capacity was mixed depending on location.
- 6. Legal services.** Organizations that provide free or low-cost legal assistance developing wills, trusts, estate plans, and advance medical directives sometimes have limited capacity to serve older adults in the region, yet demand seems to ebb and flow.

Top Barriers to Services

According to the community survey, the top five reasons older adults in Denver metro area do not access needed services are cost, lack of awareness, transportation barriers (services being too far from home), ageism, and services having waitlists or not being offered at a convenient time. For a full list of barriers, see Table 2 in the Appendix.

- 7. Medicare and public assistance counseling.** Medicare and public assistance guidance is available across the region with short or no waitlists. Organizations participating in the capacity analysis said that people are often unaware of these services. See recommendation 7a for more information.

Expanding awareness of services requires trust between community organizations and older adults and their care partners. Older adults are often the target of scams or experience aggressive marketing from companies.^{5,6} Marketing and outreach efforts to engage older adults are often fragmented and don't always address families or care partners.



“Older adults can find it hard to determine whether services are worthwhile, or if they are scams. Many businesses tend to overmarket to older adults.”—Service provider

“We have really struggled with getting more people to hear about our services.”—Service provider

“I think we do a good job of meeting the demand, but there are so many people who don’t know we exist.”—Service provider

“There are a lot of resources and services already out there! But there’s an access and communication issue.”—Service provider

“As a caregiver, I only find out about resources by going online, but there are so many pages they have to read through. And if English wasn’t my first language, this would be hard.”—Care partner

Recommendation 2a.

Create or identify an annual opportunity for JFS clients and other older adults and care partners to share their needs, learn about available programs, and connect with each other about resources.

- **Next steps.** Create a budget for the event. Identify a space and facilitator to hold the networking event. Identify staff to coordinate outreach and support the event.
- **Supporting information.** Potential partners for this recommendation include Kavod Senior Life, Colorado Center on Aging, local councils on aging, and DRCOG.

Recommendation 2b.

Educate older adults, their care partners and families, and local organizations about [AgeWise Colorado](#), a free central resource hub with information about health, social, aging, and long-term care services.

- **Next steps.** Identify and engage with current JFS partners and organizations in the aging community that are not AgeWise Colorado providers to consider becoming members. Identify newsletters, community and organization-based social media accounts, local newspaper, resource fairs, and radio stations to spread awareness of AgeWise Colorado to older adults, their care partners and families.

Recommendation 2c.

Create a community or resource liaison position within JFS that is dedicated to attending community events, building relationships with community partners, and creating a detailed internal contact list of all the agencies and organizations that offer older adult services in the Denver metro region.

- **Next steps.** Create a budget to support a community or resource navigator within JFS. Develop a job description and ensure that this position has the support needed for the workload and capacity they will handle.

Recommendation 2d.

Monitor legal and financial assistance service options due to mixed availability and high demand from older adults in the region.

- **Next steps.** Identify financial assistance and legal services to monitor for capacity shifts.
- **Supporting information.**
 - Potential legal services to monitor include DRCOG referrals to legal contractors, Colorado Elder Law, Osterman Law Firm, and Colorado Legal Services.
 - Potential financial assistance services to monitor include Sunshine Home Share Colorado, the Denver Financial Empowerment Center, Brothers Redevelopment, and the Boulder County Area Agency on Aging.

Strategy 3.

Build and maintain relationships with diverse communities.

Challenge. Health and social services are not always inclusive or welcoming to older adults from all racial, ethnic, or social backgrounds. This is a barrier for people from historically marginalized communities. About 21% of older adults who participated in the community survey said they either did not have access to the services they needed due to concerns about being treated unfairly, not being able to relate to anyone, or lacking culturally appropriate services.

Some Denver metro organizations said they struggle to reach older adults in historically marginalized communities. Without connections between these communities and service providers, older adults might not reach out for services until they are in crisis.

Recommendation 3a.

Train JFS staff on diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and LGBTQ+ allyship.

- **Next steps.** Create a budget and engage with diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging consultants to identify ways JFS can address any gaps and barriers identified in its internal policies, workflow, or protocol. Identify and apply for grants to support internal diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and allyship trainings.
- **Supporting information.** Potential partners for this recommendation include The Equity Project, Blazing Cloud Consulting, and Kernel Core Messaging.

Recommendation 3b.

Engage with LGBTQ+ organizations in the region that support and/or offer programs for older adults and their allies.

- **Next steps.** Meet with representatives from [Out Boulder County](#) and [SAGE of the Rockies](#) for insight on how to make services more inclusive of older LGBTQ+ adults.



“Regarding culturally appropriate services, as a member of the LGBTQ community I frequently have to decide if I think I will be welcomed and comfortable at group events.” — Older adult

Recommendation 3c.

Partner with organizations and community leaders to identify outreach best practices and service needs for older adults in the Hispanic/Latino/a, Black and African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.

- **Next steps.** Cultivate relationships with relevant organizations and diverse leaders in the region. In partnership with these groups, identify strategies for how JFS can offer new services or expand existing services to be more culturally competent.
- **Supporting information.** Potential partnerships for this recommendation include ViVe Wellness, Tepeyac Community Health Center, Denver Indian Health Center and Family Services, Center for African American Health, Colorado Latino Leadership, Advocacy and Research Organization, Asian Pacific Development Center, and Four Winds American Indian Council.

Strategy 4.

Offer services in multiple languages to reduce language barriers.

Challenge. In the Denver metro area, more than one in 10 older adults (11%) speak a language other than English at home — usually Spanish.⁷ Some service providers in the region have expanded to include bilingual staff or offer services in Spanish. Yet other organizations, including JFS, do not currently offer services in Spanish, leaving older adults with limited English proficiency fewer options for accessing health and social services.

CHI's capacity analysis revealed a shortage of Spanish-language referral services, case management, and general assistance with connecting to local providers. Additionally, many organizations that offer services in multiple languages do not currently advertise those options on their websites.

Recommendation 4a.

Coordinate with organizations that offer services in Spanish to older adults and their care partners.

- **Next steps.** Develop a partnership strategy that strengthens relationships between JFS and organizations in the Denver metro area that serve this community. Partner with and support these organizations to coordinate and provide these services.
- **Supporting information.** Potential partnerships for this recommendation include ViVe Wellness, Servicios de La Raza, the Conectoras de Montbello program at the Colorado Latino Leadership Advocacy and Research Organization, Denver Public Library, and Latino Age Wave Colorado.

Recommendation 4b.

Hire culturally competent bilingual staff in case management roles.

- **Next steps.** Create a budget and hire for new staff positions. Coordinate with partners identified in 4a to spread awareness about new services being offered at JFS. Publicize Spanish-language services on JFS's website to ensure current and prospective clients are aware of them.
- **Supporting information.** Coordinate with organizations like DRCOG, which offer case management services in Spanish, to identify best practices for setting up and maintaining these services.

To explore device ownership and race/ethnicity among older adults, by geography, visit <https://arcg.is/1fXDyS>

Strategy 5.

Address internalized ageism and stigma among older adults.

Challenge. Ageism is a pervasive challenge. It can lead to poor health outcomes, social isolation, financial insecurity, and shortened life spans among older adults.^{8,9} Internalized ageism and negative attitudes about getting older and asking for help can delay outreach for needed supports.^{10,11}

Internalized ageism and self-perceived stigma can harm a person's quality of life and limit the types of services available to them. Organizations that primarily serve older adults said that people often wait to ask for needed services until they are facing a crisis such as imminent eviction or a worsening medical condition.

Recommendation 5a.

Offer or refer current and prospective JFS clients to resources like Changing the Narrative's Ending Ageism Together and Age-Friendly Health Care workshops or an Aging Mastery Program, which takes an asset-based perspective on aging and empowers participants to take charge of their aging process by sharpening their community engagement skills and providing approaches to improve their physical and mental well-being.¹²

- **Next steps.** Decide if an Aging Mastery Program or ageism workshop should be offered at JFS. If not, identify existing classes or workshops in the region to which JFS clients can be referred.



“I need help with rental assistance, but I am too embarrassed to ask.” – Older adult

“Aging is not a downward decline, it's another stage of life. Some of the biggest barriers are internal ageist bias.” – Service provider



Joseph Cohen, Bob Doi, and Peter Sachs talk while eating lunch at the JCC.

Recommendation 5b.

Expand current partnerships with [LinkAGES Colorado](#) and [Generations United](#) to support intergenerational opportunities for older adults to build connections with others.

- **Next steps.** Identify funders, such as the [Eisner Foundation](#), to support the expansion of current intergenerational programs at JFS.
- **Supporting information.** There is an opportunity to combine this guidance with recommendation 6a and partner with the [Supporting Older Adults through Relationships and Resources](#) (SOARR) with Technology program through the University of Colorado Denver.

Strategy 6. Improve technology literacy and access among older adults and their care partners.

Challenge. Technologies such as smartphones, the internet, tablets, and computers are important ways for older adults and their care partners to work, stay connected to their community, and access services. This includes smartphone applications that hail ride services, connect them with loved ones via Zoom or Facetime, enable telehealth appointments, and more.

Yet studies show that some older adults face challenges when learning about new technology and may benefit from opportunities to increase technology literacy.^{13,14} Community survey respondents said they often identify available services via the internet, but need extra support



“My eyesight is getting bad from looking at cellphones, computers, and junk mail. The way of communicating is changing daily. Most things you need to use the internet for.” — Older adult

“Social experience was difficult due to COVID. My mom is in an assisted living facility, and you could only do activities on Zoom if you were computer savvy.” — Older adult

“It’s easier to get a ride when you use your phone or computer.” — Older adult

to feel more confident using the technology. Free or low-cost trainings and services exist, but either people are not being connected to them or they prefer one-on-one coaching, which is harder to find in the region.

Some older adults don’t own a smartphone, laptop, or tablet, and this varies by age and neighborhood in the Denver metro region. About 20% of adults 75 and older did not own or use a smartphone, laptop, or tablet in the past year, compared to just 8% of all adults 55 and older.¹⁵ Older adults in west central Adams County (Thornton and Federal Heights) and northwest Denver were less likely to own one of these devices. These areas are also more racial and ethnically diverse than communities with higher rates of device ownership. (See box on Page 10).



Volunteer Warren Saslow organizes boxes of food at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Food Pantry in Denver.

Recommendation 6a.

Identify and refer older adults and their care partners to existing technology literacy training services. Services may vary depending on what learning environment best suits the individual.

- **Next steps.** Identify online or local technology literacy trainings that provide services across different settings, deploy older adults to teach their peers, and employ diverse teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles. Work with organizations that already offer these services to create a strategy for promoting and sharing information about these services to older adults who need them.
- **Supporting information.** Potential partnerships for this recommendation include Senior Planet, Denver Public Library and other public libraries in the Denver metro region, Kavod on the Road, A Little Help, and the University of Colorado's Center for Inclusive Design and Engineering.

Recommendation 6b.

Offer one-on-one technology training with digital navigators who can provide on-demand help with cell phone basics, creating email accounts, file and software management, online form navigation, and more.

- **Next steps.** Create a budget for contracting or hiring digital navigators. Identify best practices for providing digital navigation and technology assistance.
- **Supporting information.** The Denver Public Library may be able to offer best practices for offering one-on-one digital navigator services to older adults.

Recommendation 6c.

Partner with local or national organizations to provide free or low-cost devices and internet services to older adults in need.

- **Next steps.** Identify partners who are interested in or have an established goal to provide free or low-cost devices. Create a budget and identify the types of technology needed. Use this [map link](#) to find Denver metro neighborhoods with the greatest need.
- **Supporting information.** Potential partners for this recommendation include local organizations identified in 6a, the Older Adults Technology Services, and PCs for People. For example, the Denver Public Library allows people to check out Chromebooks and hotspots as an alternative to owning their own.

Strategy 7. Promote chronic disease prevention, screening, and management.

Challenge. As people get older, there is a higher risk for chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.¹⁶

Preventive activities can reduce or delay onset of chronic diseases and detect issues before they worsen.¹⁷ Yet accessible health care options are not available to all older adults and their care partners. In 2021, 23% of older adults in the Denver metro area did not seek preventive care in the past 12 months, up slightly from 21% in 2019.¹⁸ And about 60% of adults 60 and older in DRCOG’s service region said they did not have good access to health care.¹⁹

While improving access to health care facilities will require the cross-sector collaboration (highlighted in strategy 11), nonprofits can educate and empower older adults with information and resources needed to make decisions about seeking out preventive services, screenings, or disease management best practices.

Some older adults said that accessing needed care or screenings is difficult when insurance coverage is inconsistent and hard to understand. Nationally, one in three Medicare beneficiaries report difficulty understanding the program or comparing coverage options, and about half (47%) of adults 60 and older in DRCOG’s service region said they at least had a minor problem understanding their public program benefits, including Medicare.^{20,21}



Recommendation 7a. Promote free or low-cost resources that can assist older adults with questions about Medicare coverage and other public benefits like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

- **Next steps.** Develop materials, such as question guides, and outreach strategies to share contact information or links to websites that clarify Medicare coverage and costs.
- **Supporting information.**
 - Potential partnerships include Benefits in Action, DRCOG’s Benefits Counseling, Boulder County AAA’s Benefits Counseling.
 - Potential resources include [AARP’s Medicare Resource Center](#), [AgeWise Colorado Blogs](#), and the [National Council on Aging’s AgeWell Planner](#).



“Waitlists, especially for specialist care, are awful! I could be dead by the time I get an appointment.”— Older adult

“Medicare is so complicated. It required so much diligence.”— Care partner

“I have Medicare Part A and I need physical therapy, but I am not sure if there are any hidden costs after my copay.”— Older adult

Services Wanted by Older Community Members

The community survey revealed the top services that older adults in the Denver metro area wished they could have used in the past year: gym and fitness classes, home repair or handyman services, public library programs, community social events, and outdoor activities. JFS and other stakeholders may consider partnering with organizations that offer these services to create a streamlined referral process. Data on service preference and a breakdown by age group can be found in Table 1 of the Appendix.

Recommendation 7b.

Coordinate with the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, the Colorado Alzheimer's Association, and Denver Public Library to access infographics and posters that can be shared with clients about activities to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia onset and the importance of annual cognitive screenings.

- **Next steps.** Engage with representatives from the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment's Prevention Services Division and the Colorado Alzheimer's Association to identify information and resources JFS can share with current and prospective clients.
- **Supporting information.**
 - [Colorado's state Alzheimer's disease and related dementias plan](#) identifies risk reduction activities that the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment and other stakeholders will implement over the next few years.
 - The [Denver Public Library](#) offers a robust slate of programs for people experiencing Alzheimer's Disease or related dementias and their care partners.

Recommendation 7c.

Partner with local clinics and public health organizations to offer nutritional counseling and host regular health fairs, webinars, or speaking events at JFS or affiliated community centers. These events can spread information about chronic disease prevention, screening, and management.

- **Next steps.** Identify partnership opportunities with local clinics and public health organizations to integrate older adults' specific health needs into current health fair events or create new health and wellness events.
- **Supporting information.**
 - Established health and wellness events include 9News Health Fairs and the Center for African American Health Annual Collaborative Health Fair.
 - Public health and fitness facilities include those sponsored by local public health agencies, ViVe Wellness, and Denver Parks and Recreation's Active Older Adults program.

Strategy 8.

Build out fall prevention and detection activities and services.

Challenge. Falls can be life-changing and costly to older adults and their families. A serious fall can reduce a person's mobility and independence and increase the likelihood of falling again.^{22,23}

Each year, millions of Americans 65 and older fall. Falls are the leading cause of injury for older adults, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In the Denver metro area, more than 21,000 older adults were treated at an emergency department due to injuries from falling in 2021.²⁴ Over a third (34%) of adults 60 and older in DRCOG's service region said they have fallen and injured themselves at least once in the past 12 months.²⁵

Fall prevention activities and services, such as strength and balance fitness classes and home

modification, were ranked as some of the most needed services by adults 55 and older in the community survey, signaling a need for better access and referrals to these services.

Recommendation 8a.

Partner with DRCOG and other Area Agencies on Aging to leverage grant funding to offer free or low-cost wearables, such as Apple watches, that can detect falls and call for help.

- **Next steps.** Identify current funding or grants that support the delivery of fall detection technology.
- **Supporting information.** [Senate Bill 22-185](#) extends funding indefinitely to support projects that promote health, equity, well-being, and safety of older Coloradans.

Recommendation 8b.

Cultivate partnerships with local free or low-cost home modification providers to streamline a referral process for repairs that cannot be provided under recommendation 1b.

- **Next steps.** Identify local home modification service providers. Create a referral plan based on JFS's clients needs and the service provider's eligibility requirements.
- **Supporting information.** Potential partnerships for this recommendation include Brothers Redevelopment, Home Builders Foundation, and the HomesRenewed Coalition.

Recommendation 8c.

Collaborate with partners identified in recommendation 7c to offer resources on fall prevention and information on virtual or in-person fitness classes for strength and balance exercises.

- **Next steps.** Refer to partnerships identified by recommendation 7c.
- **Supporting information.** Potential resources and programs include Nymbi, Vivo, [AgeWise Colorado's webinars](#), and Silver Sneakers.

Strategy 9.

Educate older adults and their care partners about elevated health risks due to extreme heat and poor air quality.

Challenge. Older adults are disproportionately affected by extreme heat and poor air quality. These events are quickly becoming common occurrences in the Denver metro area.²⁶ Age-related changes to the body — including decreased blood circulation and the heightened presence of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, or respiratory illnesses — put older adults at higher risk of experiencing negative health outcomes during extreme heat or poor air quality days.²⁷

Climate and weather-related events also have economic consequences. High heat days increase electricity usage to keep homes cool, placing a greater burden on the 84,000 older adults in the Denver metro area whose incomes are at or below the federal poverty level.²⁸

Some organizations said they need more information how to support older adults during heat waves or poor air quality days. They requested strategies for communicating information to their clients.

CHI's capacity analysis found that there is a shortage of home repair or modification services offering weatherization services to older adults in the Denver area. Most services have waitlists. Others have strict eligibility criteria and won't serve older adults with incomes over the 200% Federal Poverty Level (around \$36,000 for a family of two).



“I recently got an air purifier to help with all the wildfire smoke. Other [older adults] could use help with home-based services like changing air filters.”
— Older adult

“[Climate change] affects so much. Our organization doesn't know what to do about it. We serve a lot of low-income older adults, and their homes are not adequate in the heat. The summers are getting hotter for longer.” — Service provider

Recommendation 9a.

Educate current and prospective clients about home repairs and modifications that can protect them from poor air quality days and extreme weather events. Promote local organizations that offer home weatherization or bill assistance to older adults with fixed or low incomes.

- **Next steps.** Develop outreach strategies such as resource fairs, webinars, and mail campaigns to inform older adults about cost-effective strategies for preventing or reducing climate-related health risks in their homes. Identify and engage with organizations that provide free or low-cost home weatherization services.
- **Supporting information.** Examples of Colorado programs that provide weatherization assistance programs include the [Colorado Energy Office](#), [Energy Outreach Colorado](#), and [Energy Resource Center](#).

Recommendation 9b.

Serve as a trusted resource on heat and air quality safety measures by providing basic information and guidance for older adults and their care partners.

- **Next steps.** Identify resources that can be shared with current and prospective JFS clients. Develop strategies for sharing resources and guidelines before or during high heat days or poor air quality days. This can include sharing instructions on creating, or giving away [Corsi-Rosenthal boxes](#), which are low-cost, do-it-yourself room air filters that work to clean indoor air.

Supporting information.

- Examples of resources include [air quality alerts](#), [cooling center locations](#), [general air quality information](#), and [infographics](#).
- Potential partnerships include Western Resource Advocates, Healthy Air and Water Colorado, Colorado Health Institute, and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Air Pollution Control Division's Climate Program.

Strategy 10.

Elevate older adult voices and experiences to include their perspectives in local and state policy development.

Challenge. Local organizations and state leaders in the aging space do not currently provide older adults with sufficient opportunity to share their experiences with funders and policymakers.

Most adults 60 and older in DRCOG's service region want to be civically engaged. About 88% usually or always vote in local elections. However, about a third do not feel like their voice is heard in the community.²⁹

Older adults are missing from policy conversations. A national analysis conducted by LeadingAge found that during discussions for President Biden's Build Back Better bill, only 6% of media coverage and less than 1% of tweets from congressional members referenced older adults.³⁰ CHI heard that advocates for older adults and their care partners are not as well-organized or vocal as other interest groups.

Recommendation 10a.

Engage older adults and other stakeholders in evidence-based advocacy trainings.

- **Next steps.** Identify organizations and communities that do not have formal training on how to advocate for local and state policies that benefit older adults and their care partners. Identify organizations or programs that provide advocacy trainings.



Izak Rosen eats lunch at the JCC.



Eugene Thompson relaxes at the JCC.

Recommendation 10b.

Empower older adults to share their experiences and self-advocate.

- **Next steps.** With assistance from coalition members identified in recommendation 11c, identify opportunities for older adults and their care partners to advocate for needed services, stronger age discrimination laws, and investments in older adults at local and state levels.
- **Supporting information.** Established advocate opportunities include the Elder Action Network, Third Act, Colorado Center for Aging, and HomesRenewed Coalition.



“[The aging community] has got to make more noise! They need to be loud, be persistent, etc. It takes time for people to listen, and it takes time and political pressure for budget offices and the Joint Budget Committee to start paying attention to things.” — Government official

Strategy 11.

Strengthen inter- and cross-sector partnerships and initiatives that benefit everyone, including older adults.

Challenge. Challenges with affordable housing, food assistance, accessible transportation, physical and behavioral health services, and employment services span all age groups and communities in the Denver metro area.

Older adults can face additional challenges accessing services to support their social, economic, and health needs due to physical and cognitive difficulties, fixed or lower incomes, ageism, and caregiving responsibilities. CHI’s capacity analysis found that transportation issues limit access to many services for older adults that already exist in their communities. Transportation services to reduce these barriers exist, but many have service area limitations, are only available for certain outings like medical appointments, or cannot be called on for day-of services.

Older adults of color and LGBTQ+ older adults face additional barriers due to historic and systemic injustices that continue to widen disparities in access to needed services.^{31,32}

Organizations that serve specific populations or offer services limited to certain topics are often siloed, resulting in a diffusion of funding across multiple efforts and disjointed collaboration.^{33,34} Initiatives that consider the needs of older adults can benefit families, communities, and businesses.³⁵

Recommendation 11a.

Engage in the Metro Denver Social-Health Information Exchange initiative, a collaboration of public health and human service agencies, health systems and hospitals, community-based organizations, community members, Regional Accountable Entities, and technical organizations. The goal of the initiative is to develop an interoperable Social-Health Information Exchange to better coordinate care and resources among providers to enhance whole-person and whole-family health and well-being. Partners can engage by joining a workgroup, focus group, community conversation, or key informant interview. The Metro Denver Partnership for Health leads and CHI convenes and facilitates the initiative.

- **Next steps.** To get involved, contact Kirsti Klaverkamp at KlaverkampK@coloradohealthinstitute.org or Ashlie Brown at BrownA@coloradohealthinstitute.org.

Recommendation 11b.

Pilot a Silos to Circles Age Well Initiative to strengthen local connections to services for older adults, their care partners, families, and communities.

- **Next steps.** Identify an organization or community to pilot the initiative. Create a budget and identify a grant to support the project.

Recommendation 11c.

Identify local and state partnerships to create a coalition that advocates for and represents the aging space in existing coalitions and initiatives that address housing, food, employment, and physical and behavioral health care.

- **Next steps.** Identify local and state entities that share common interests in advocating for older adults and their care partners. Create a formal or informal coalition of these partners. Identify existing coalitions or initiatives that focus on health issues yet do not include strong advocacy for older adults and their care partners.
- **Supporting information.**
 - Local and state partners may include the Colorado Business Group on Health, DRCOG, Lifelong Colorado, Colorado Center for Aging, Colorado Department of Human Services, Colorado Gerontological Society, the Colorado Commission on Aging, and the Colorado Civic Engagement Roundtable.
 - Existing coalitions may include the Denver Joint Task Force on Homelessness, Older Adult Policy Collaborative, the Department of Family Medicine and Center for Bioethics and Humanities at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, and the Coalition for Immigrant Health.

Recommendation 11d.

Braid and blend funding to support initiatives and services that benefit older adults and their care partners.

- **Next step.** With coalition members in 11c, identify projects, programs, and services that require larger pools of funding to implement or expand.

Strategy 12.

Balance the external demand for services with internal financial barriers.

Challenge. JFS and other stakeholders will need to identify and obtain sustainable funding sources to implement these recommendations. However,



“Funding for these two programs is not readily available — at least not like it was.”

— Service provider

funding was identified as a consistent pain point among organizations and programs that serve older adults.

Many service providers said they are unable to expand existing programs or create new opportunities to meet the needs of older adults and their care partners due to funding limitations.

Many organizations rely on generous grant funding from

philanthropic partners, but those funds only last a few years, leaving organizations scrambling to find additional funding to pay staff and keep services going. Additionally, less than 1% of philanthropic grants in the US go to aging-related initiatives.³⁶

More philanthropic partners need to engage with local organizations and nonprofits to ensure that improvements to older adult service access, delivery, and quality in the region can be implemented.

Recommendation 12a.

Large philanthropic groups should create funding opportunities for programs and initiatives that equitably support community members of all ages.

- **Next step.** Identify a funder to coordinate and lead convenings with local, state, and national funders. Convenings should educate funders about how their funding priorities can intersect and affect older adults.

Recommendation 12b.

State agencies and elected officials should evaluate their policies and budgets to identify strategies to bolster funding to service providers.

- **Next step.** Coordinate with local collaboratives and the Colorado Center for Aging on establishing relationships with state legislators to introduce and/or advocate for initiatives that benefit both older adults and community members.

Recommendation 12c.

Service providers such as JFS should dedicate staff to tracking requests for proposals and grant opportunities to support specific programs and goals.

- **Next step.** Identify a staff member responsible for regularly tracking open requests for proposals and grants.

Conclusion

Expanding services for older adults and their care partners in the Denver metro area requires continuous coordination and partnership among service providers within and outside the aging space. More efforts at the local and state level are needed to reduce barriers and connect older adults and their care partners with the services they need to feel excited and prepared to age in their community. Financial support from philanthropic partners and state leaders is imperative to successfully implement and maintain these recommendations and to ensure a Colorado in which people of all ages thrive. The strategies and recommendations outlined in this report lay the foundation for opportunities to support older adults and their care partners, communities, and service providers.

Appendix

Data Tables

Table 1. Services older adults in the Denver metro area wished they used in the past 12 months, but didn't, in rank order with 1 being the most desired, by age group. *

Service	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
Food assistance services	9	8	6	3
Gym or fitness classes	1	1	2	3
Volunteering	2	3	6	5
Public transit	4	6	10	4
Financial planning services	8	4	9	5
Legal planning services	4	4	6	4
Mortgage or rental assistance	5	6	8	5
Home repair or handyman services	4	2	1	2
Employment services	10	10	13	5
Physical health care	9	8	11	3
Dental health care	7	5	6	4
Vision and hearing care	6	7	7	5
Mental health care	8	8	10	3
Nursing home or assisted living care	9	11	12	4
Adult day care program	9	9	10	4
Personal care or homemaker services	7	6	5	1
Faith-based services	9	4	8	5
Community social events	7	4	4	1
Outdoor activities (includes classes or activities such as biking, fishing, or hiking)	3	3	6	2
Public library programs	5	3	3	2

*Rankings with duplicate numbers in each age group indicate a tie.

Source: JFS Community Survey on Aging, 2022

Table 2. Barriers that prevented survey respondents from accessing needed programs, services, or activities.*

Barrier	Percentage
Cost	38%
Awareness	34%
Other: includes COVID-19, physical or cognitive health issues, motivation, and distrust of people	27%
Transportation	22%
Services are too far from home	11%
Ageism	10%
Waitlists	10%
Services not provided at a convenient time	10%
Not being able to relate to anyone	10%
Environmental or weather-related barriers	9%
Work responsibilities	9%
Stigma or being worried what people would think	7%
Caregiving responsibilities	7%
Lack of internet or broadband access	7%
Concern about being treated fairly	7%
Lack of culturally appropriate services	5%
Language barriers	5%

*Survey respondents could select multiple barriers.

Source: JFS Community Survey on Aging, 2022

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- **Sydney Langer**, Next50 Initiative
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- **Amy DeIPo**, Denver Public Library
- **Teresa Falagraday**, City and County of Denver and Back to Work 50+
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