

Joe Lombardo
Governor

Richard Whitley, MS
Director



DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

AGING AND DISABILITY SERVICES DIVISION
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Dena Schmidt
Administrator

Commission on Aging

NRS 439 – Report

NRS 427A

Community Needs and Priorities for Older Adults

Submitted to Richard Whitley, MS, Director

Submitted by Dena Schmidt, Commission Chair

Department of Health and Human Services

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I. Executive Summary

Introduction

The Nevada Commission on Aging (COA) is dedicated to identifying and evaluating the needs of the state's older population. Our mission includes prioritizing the most urgent needs, preventing unnecessary duplication of services, and promoting community-based programs that enable aging in place. This report, as mandated by NRS 439.630(6), presents the Commission's recommendations regarding the community needs and priorities for older adults in Nevada.

The COA conducted an analysis of data from the Nevada State Plan on Aging, the Elders Count Nevada (2023), and the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP) Four-Year Stand-Alone State Plan for 2024-2027, and incorporated insights from the recently completed ADSD Olmstead Plan. The methodology also includes presentations to the Commission from state programs and community organizations serving older adults. Additionally, the COA reviewed legislation affecting older persons during the 82nd Legislative session.

Key Findings

- Population Demographics and Trends: Nevada is experiencing rapid growth in its older adult population, particularly in rural areas. The state has become more diverse, with a significant increase in non-white and Hispanic populations, making Nevada a majority-minority state.
- Community Living Preferences and Benefits: Older adults and people with disabilities prefer community living over institutional settings due to the social connections and quality of life it offers. Community living also provides significant economic benefits, being more cost-effective than institutional care.
- Strategic Goals related to Older Adults: The State Plan on Aging and the ADSD Olmstead Plan outline five goals each, focused on infrastructure improvement, workforce capacity expansion, service delivery accountability, person-centered approaches, holistic frameworks for addressing healthcare advocacy, protections, and the comprehensive needs of vulnerable adults.

Summation

This report provides a demographic overview of older adults in Nevada. As well as cross-sectional analysis of community needs and priorities from various strategic plans, Commission meetings, and public input. It concludes with several recommendations from the Nevada Commission on Aging's to address the needs of Nevada's aging population. By focusing on community-based living, enhancing service delivery, and fostering inclusivity, Nevada can ensure a higher quality of life for its older residents. The implementation of these recommendations will create a supportive environment that values the contributions and needs of older adults, ultimately benefiting the entire community. The COA will continue to evaluate programs, propose new initiatives, and recommend legislation to better serve Nevada's older population, aligning efforts with public and private organizations across various sectors including education, employment, health, housing, welfare, and recreation.

II. Population Facts and Statistics

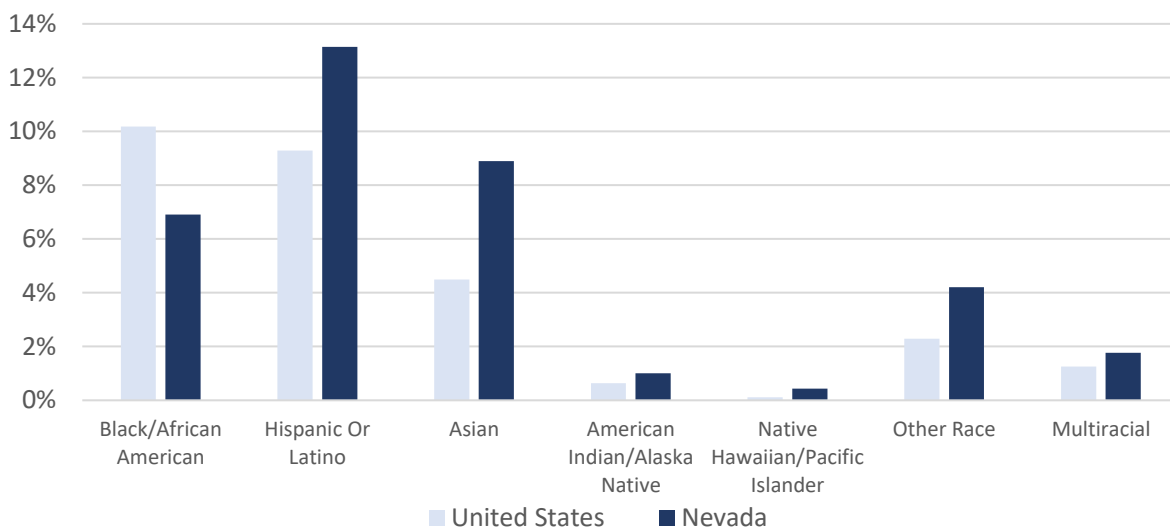
Demographic Overview of Older Adults in Nevada

Nevada's population of older adults is rapidly increasing, particularly in rural areas. The aging population in Nevada is expected to continue growing at a rapid pace. Between 2011 and 2018, the population of adults aged 65 and older increased by 46% versus the U.S. population which only grew by 30% in this same period.

While migration to Nevada continues to be steady, a plateau is expected as housing costs continue to inflate, however it is worth noting that in the 2023 Elders Count Report the largest age group moving to rural communities was the 65-74 age group, a shift from the 2021 Report where the largest age group was the 55-64 range. Currently, 10 of 17 Nevada counties have a population age 65 and older of 20% or higher.

Additionally, the Nevada population is more diverse than nationally. Nevada has seen significant growth in non-white and Hispanic populations, becoming a more diverse state.

Race and Ethnicity, Age 55 and older



(Source: U.S. Census; American Community Survey 2020 5-Year Estimates, Table S1602)

The state's older adult population has unique characteristics that shape their needs and priorities. Many older adults in Nevada prefer to live in their communities rather than in institutions, seeking to maintain social connections and a sense of independence. This preference for community living highlights the importance of providing accessible, community-based services that support aging in place.

Projections indicate that Nevada will need to expand its efforts in healthcare, housing, and social services to meet the demands of its growing and diverse aging population.

III. Community Needs and Priorities

Economic Security

According to the 2023 Elders Count Report, approximately 10.35% of households with an individual over the age of 65 were living in poverty in 2020. Additionally, approximately 25% of Nevadans age 65-74 remained employed and 7% over the age of 74 continue to work. Older adults continue to work for various reasons including rising cost of living, socialization, and access to healthcare. Yet, older adults also experience challenges in obtaining and maintaining

employment due to accessibility and age discrimination. Workforce initiatives such as the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP) are critical to supporting older adults in employment, however expanding efforts to ensure social determinants of health are addressed (such as housing and transportation) is also critical.

Ensuring financial stability through benefits counseling, employment opportunities, and financial literacy programs can empower older adults and disabled individuals to maintain independence and dignity. Advocacy for policies that protect retirement benefits and promote economic resilience is vital.

Food Security

Food security remains a critical concern for Nevada's aging and disabled populations, necessitating comprehensive strategies to ensure access to nutritious food and alleviate hunger among vulnerable individuals. There are various barriers to accessing sufficient and nutritious food which includes transportation constraints, physical disabilities, and financial limitations further exacerbate food insecurity among these populations. These challenges are exacerbated by limited mobility, fixed incomes, and geographic isolation, particularly in rural areas where resources are scarce.

While many programs were able to increase access and capacity throughout the pandemic, the demand for food resources has increased, particularly as inflation rates have been at historical highs. Unwinding COVID-19 pandemic flexibilities such as increased benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and increase options for grocery delivery programs as highlighted the continued challenges faced by many older adults in accessing sufficient and nutritious food. According to the 2023 Food Security Strategic Plan, 17% of survey respondents noted that high housing costs were barriers faced by individuals who are food insecure. Additional top responses were limited income, unexpected household expenses and unexpected healthcare expenses.

Food insecurity is often a predictor of future health and ensuring older adults have access to sufficient and nutritious food has to start before the age of 60.

Health and Aging

Addressing the health needs of older adults and individuals with disabilities is becoming increasingly crucial, particularly as the population growth has outpaced the growth of the healthcare infrastructure in Nevada. Health in Aging requires a cross-collaboration effort among healthcare, social services, workforce development, transportation and housing initiatives, just to name a few. In addressing the health needs of Nevada's population, careful consideration of the aging process must be included in the conversation. Systemic issues to address a broad range of issues is needed. These issues include, but are not limited to:

- **Access to Healthcare:** ensuring older adults have access to quality healthcare services across urban, rural, and frontier areas of Nevada; including the expansion of telehealth and transportation solutions. Increased collaborations with healthcare providers and advocacy for policies that support affordable and accessible healthcare options are essential to meet the medical needs of aging and disabled populations.
- **Chronic Disease Management:** expanding programs such as Chronic Disease Self-Management and Diabetes Self-Management to help individuals manage their conditions and improve their quality of life. Increase promotion of routine health screenings, vaccinations, wellness visits and other preventive services to prevent the onset of chronic illnesses and manage existing conditions effectively.
- **Mental Health Services:** Expanding access to mental health services, including counseling and psychiatric care, to address the growing mental health needs of the aging population. Combating social isolation through various methods (i.e. community programs and technology solutions). These efforts can include social clubs, recreational activities, and intergenerational programs that foster meaningful connections and combat loneliness.

- **Healthcare Advocacy and Protections:** Strengthen healthcare advocacy and protections for older adults and vulnerable populations. Increased legislation that enhances the rights and protections of older adults and ensures they receive the care they need. These efforts also need to ensure physical accessibility and information accessibility, including digital inclusion.

Elder Abuse Prevention and Legal Safeguards

The Adult Protective Services (APS) program, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) program and the Older Adults Legal Assistance program offers a wide array of services to ensure elder rights and protections are honored both within community settings as well as residential settings. Increased public awareness campaigns to educate the community about elder abuse, resident rights, and legal assistance is critical to helping to maintain elder rights and protections.

The Adult Protective Services program investigated over 11,000 complaints in 2023. Efforts are needed to enhance services for elder abuse victims and supporting the investigation and prosecution of elder abuse cases. Comparatively, the Older Adults Legal Assistance program served 5,744 individuals in 2023.

The ADSD State Plan on Aging gives priority for legal assistance related to income, health care, long-term care, nutrition, housing, utilities, protective services, defense of guardianship, abuse, neglect, and age discrimination. The Nevada Attorney for the Rights of Older Persons and Persons with a Physical Disability, an Intellectual Disability or a Related Condition is housed in ADSD, offers public education and legislative support, and aids elder legal protections to attorneys, law enforcement, Ombudsman, advocates, Adult Protective Services and ADSD.

Support for Family Caregivers

Family caregivers are a critical component of the long-term care system and are crucial to supporting older adults remain in the community for as long as possible. Family caregivers are often overlooked in the service delivery system, yet often take on increasing responsibilities as a loved one ages. Training and resources for family caregivers is necessary to equip them with the skills needed to care for their loved ones effectively. Expanding respite care options to provide caregivers with the necessary breaks to prevent burnout and ensure they can continue providing care. There is also a financial burden to family caregiving. Exploration of financial support mechanisms such as Paid Family Leave and caregiver tax credits to alleviate the economic burden on family caregivers.

Housing and Transportation

Consistently across all communities, and within the above-mentioned needs and priorities, housing and transportation support are critical to addressing the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. Increasing the availability of accessible and affordable housing is necessary for the overall well-being of Nevadans, especially older adults living on fixed incomes. Cross agency efforts to help individuals maintain housing and reduce homelessness is a fundamental need throughout Nevada.

Access to services goes beyond an awareness of services and physical accessibility. Providing reliable and accessible transportation services is critical to access healthcare, employment opportunities, social activities, and food. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that integrates social, health, and economic factors to foster a supportive environment.

Educational Outreach and Public Awareness Directives

Issues relevant to the elderly include capacity for decision-making (related to healthcare, finances, living arrangements and other pertinent decisions); advance care planning; estate planning; guardianship and guardianship defense; risk of exploitation, abuse and neglect; ethical considerations for effective representation of the elderly; and access to justice.

There are several categories of stakeholders: the elderly, their supports and caretakers; federal, state and local governments; medical and service providers; and insurance companies and financial institutions. Educational outreach must be customized to each category to deliver relevant messaging.

Legal service providers including Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and Nevada Senior Law Program offer educational outreach services, including educational programs and attendance at community events. All public outreach needs more precise tracking and reporting, and to be developed for broader, qualitative impact and effective use of resources based on the specific target populations and issues relating to elder rights and protections. They also offer a few “Ask a Lawyer” advice stations on a limited basis in specific locations such as Justice Court (evictions). Access to justice needs to be increased with direct client contact through “Ask a Lawyer” stations at public locations such as libraries and Courthouses, and all senior centers, for elder legal issues.

A public interest campaign needs to be developed across State divisions to raise awareness of elder rights and abuses. Promote awareness and education related to elder rights and protections to legal professionals and judges through law schools, bar associations and continuing legal education and to the medical profession through continuing education to physicians, nurses, social workers, caretakers, EMT and other service providers.

Responsive Emergency Services

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that there is an increasing need for responsive emergency services tailored to the aging and disabled population. The Nevada Commission on Aging, in collaboration with the Aging and Disability Services Division (ADSD), recognizes the importance of preparing and equipping the state to meet these emerging needs effectively. Accessibility, training, inclusion, and collaboration are all necessary to ensure a robust emergency response system that is targeted to the unique needs of older adults and people with disabilities. A system that includes universal design, preparedness programs, and varied communication channels is necessary to supporting Nevada’s vulnerable populations in an emergency.

IV. COA Recommendations

By addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Nevada's aging and disabled populations through initiatives that enhance social inclusion, healthcare access, economic security, and housing options, communities can significantly improve quality of life measures. The Commission on Aging (COA) remains committed to advocating for policies and programs that prioritize the well-being and dignity of older adults and disabled individuals, ensuring they lead fulfilling and meaningful lives in their communities. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that integrates social, health, and economic factors to foster a supportive environment.

Timely and accurate data collection is essential for addressing the needs of the elderly. Understanding the extent to which these needs are met, and the standard of available care requires collaborative approaches. A systemic, cross-sector approach to data collection and analysis is necessary to serve as a foundation for informed decision making and policy through actionable measures.

The Commission on Aging puts forth the following recommendations to address some of the challenges highlighted within this report.

Promoting Social Inclusion and Engagement: Initiatives should focus on reducing social isolation by expanding community-based programs and activities tailored to older adults and disabled individuals. These efforts can include social clubs, recreational activities, and intergenerational programs that foster meaningful connections and combat loneliness.

Improving Access to Healthcare Services: Enhancing access to healthcare through telehealth services, mobile clinics, and transportation assistance is crucial. Collaborations with healthcare providers and advocacy for policies that support affordable and accessible healthcare options are essential to meet the medical needs of aging and disabled populations.

Supporting Economic Security: Ensuring financial stability through benefits counseling, employment opportunities, and financial literacy programs can empower older adults and disabled individuals to maintain independence and dignity. Advocacy for policies that protect retirement benefits and promote economic resilience is vital.

Advancing Housing Options: Accessible and affordable housing options that cater to the unique needs of older adults and disabled individuals should be prioritized. Collaborations with housing authorities and developers can facilitate the development of age-friendly housing and modifications that support independent living.

Continuing Education for Professionals: Offering Continuing education (CE) credits focusing on ethics and best practices in elder care to attorneys, physicians, and licensed professionals can foster a more informed and compassionated approach to supporting older adults. This aligns with annual licensure requirements and bolsters elder rights and protections.

Prioritizing Ethical Hospice Care: Ensuring ethical medical care for individuals with a hospice diagnosis is paramount. The COA emphasizes attentive ethical standards in hospice settings, promoting guidelines and training to safeguard the dignity and well-being of terminally ill patients and their families.

Legal Services: Establishing “Ask a Lawyer” public locations in libraries, courthouses, and senior centers provides accessible avenues for older adults to seek legal advice and support for elder-related issues. Strengthening partnerships with legal service providers and the UNLV Boyd School of Law ensures regular provision of legal assistance, empowering older adults by safeguarding their legal rights.

V. Conclusion

Underscoring these efforts are the need for more comprehensive approaches to public awareness of existing services, as well as to safeguard elder rights. Engaging across state and local governments, service providers, community organizations, and other stakeholders will raise awareness about the vulnerabilities faced by older adults and promote proactive protective measures.

Finally, as previously noted throughout this document, addressing the multifaceted challenges confronting Nevada’s aging population requires collaborative action. Through ethical leadership, inclusive decision making and proactive advocacy against elder abuse and fraud, the COA can champion the rights and well-being of older adults. By fostering partnerships, raising public awareness, and ensuring compliance with federal mandates, we can create a supportive environment where older adults receive the respect, care, and protection they deserve. Together, let us build a community that values and safeguards the dignity of our aging population.

V. Membership

The current members of the Commission on Aging are as follows for the period ending June 30, 2024:

- Voting Members
 - Officers or Employees of a City Government
 - Stacy York
 - Courtney Warner
 - Officers or Employees of a County Government
 - Tammy Hendrix
 - Dorothy Edwards
 - Members with Experience in Services for the Aging
 - Wendy Simons
 - Chris Vito, Assistant Director, Nev Geriatric Education Center
 - Deanne O’Rear Cameron
 - Richard Aguila
 - Natalie Mazullo
 - Anna Ladao
 - Molly Walt
- Non-Voting Members
 - Member of the Senate
 - Senator Marilyn Dondero Loop
 - Member of the Assembly
 - Assemblyman Duy Nguyen
 - Director, Department of Health and Human Services
 - Richard Whitley, MS
 - Administrator, Aging and Disability Services Division
 - Dena Schmidt

VI. References

- [Nevada Aging Statistics & Resource Guide | Sixty and Me](#) Nevada Aging Statistics & Resource Guide
- [Elders Count Nevada 2023 \(nv.gov\)](#) ELDERS COUNT NEVADA 2023 Report
- [Social Determinants of Health and Older Adults | health.gov, dated May 13, 2024, accessed Jun 24, 2024](#)
- How Access to Affordable Transportation Leads to Better Health Outcomes for Older Adults, Jun 17, 2024, accessed Jun 24, 2024, [How Can Older Adults Get Help with Using Transportation Services? \(ncoa.org\)](#)
- The Top 5 Financial Scams Targeting Older Adults, Dec 08, 2023, accessed Jun 24, 2024, [The Top 5 Financial Scams Targeting Seniors \(ncoa.org\)](#)
- [Optimizing tech for older adults \(apa.org\) Jul 1, 2021, accessed Jun 24, 2024](#)
- [Share of tech users among Americans 65 and older grew in past decade | Pew Research Center, dated Jul 13, 2022, accessed Jun 24, 2024](#)
- [California Has a Unique Problem With Hospice Fraud. Can Legislation Stop it? – California Health Report \(calhealthreport.org\) Jun 6, 2022, accessed Jun 24, 2024](#)
- [US Justice Department’s Spotlight on Hospice Sends ‘Powerful Message’ to Fraudulent Operators - Hospice News dated Jun 13, 2023, accessed June 24, 2023](#)
- <https://www.publicnewsservice.org/2023-06-06/health/report-nevada-ranks-low-for-overall-senior-health/a84813-1#:~:text=Nevada%20has%20received%20an%20overall,its%20seniors%20in%20the%20state>. Nevada’s ranking among other States on elder issues.

State Resources and Federal Resources

Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, Aging and Disability Services Division

- [Adult Protective Services \(APS\)](#)
- [Eldercare Toolkit For State Employees](#)
- [Long Term Care Ombudsman](#)
- [Office of Community Living](#)

Access to Justice Commission | [Administrative Office of the Courts \(nvcourts.gov\)](#)

Overview of Permanent Guardianship Commission | [Administrative Office of the Courts \(nvcourts.gov\)](#)

Elders Justice Initiative | [Resources and News](#)