

Aging Our Way: Oklahoma's Multisector Plan on Aging

Stakeholder Feedback Report

2024 Listening Session Tour
and Statewide Survey Summary



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Human Services

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1.0 Introduction

In Spring 2024, *Aging Our Way* leaders sought Oklahoma perspectives regarding older adult needs to inform our Plan. Oklahomans shared their insights through in-person listening sessions and a statewide Focus Areas survey.

Oklahoma Human Services hosted five listening sessions to h Oklahomans whose voices were underrepresented in the [Current State Report](#) due to limitations in stakeholder engagement efforts. These listening sessions included older adults, aging advocates, Black Oklahomans, Oklahomans who are Spanish-speaking and faith-based leaders. These discussions provided additional insights into some of the Plan's 10 focus areas.

A total of 119 Oklahomans participated in listening sessions with the following groups in Norman and Oklahoma City:

- Healthy Living Norman
- Oklahoma Aging Advocacy Leadership Academy (OAALA)
- Northeast Wellness Center, with the OKC Black Chamber of Commerce
- Latino Community Development Agency, with Puerto de Oro
- St. Luke's Methodist Church

The prevailing themes across all the listening sessions were the needs for workforce transition solutions, efforts to reduce social isolation, support for direct care workforce and caregivers, and the availability of, awareness of and ease of access to services.

From January to March 2024, Oklahoma Human Services also conducted a statewide Focus Areas survey. The survey included demographic questions and questions about individual experiences related to the Plan's 10 focus areas.

2.0 2024 Listening Session Tour

2.1 Healthy Living Norman

[Healthy Living Norman](#), an adult community wellness center, serves older Oklahomans by offering opportunities for social connection, learning activities, physical exercise and comprehensive health services. Oklahoma Human Services selected Healthy Living Norman as a listening session location to gain the perspective of people directly served by aging solutions like senior wellness centers. This session aided in understanding how the Plan can fill gaps that exist in service delivery to older Oklahomans. The listening session's 27 participants were mostly older Oklahomans, who regularly attend Healthy Living Norman.

Key Themes:

- Aging centers, like Healthy Living Norman, provide many resources for Oklahomans and Oklahoma should seek to provide services in a way that meets their communities needs.
- *Aging Our Way's* transportation initiatives should expand transportation services to get older Oklahomans to where they would like to go and not limit destinations to health facilities and grocery stores.
- *Aging Our Way* should support reskilling opportunities, age-friendly work environments and intergenerational volunteer opportunities so people sustain a continued sense of purpose later in life.

“Aging Centers are great for seniors, strategic planning to increase the number of seniors who are aware of aging centers will help older Oklahomans access services and programs for them.”

- **Listening Session Participant, Norman, 2024**

[How can we support older adults who want to remain in the workforce longer?] “Continuing education programs that reskill older Oklahomans to enter the workforce again or maintain their participation in the workforce.”

- **Listening Session Participant, Norman, 2024**

2.2 OAALA Kickoff (Norman)

[Oklahoma Aging Advocacy Leadership Academy \(OAALA\)](#) trains volunteer, aging services professionals and interested community members to advocate for Oklahoma’s aging population. Oklahoma Human Services chose the Spring 2024 OAALA kickoff as a listening session site to gain perspectives of aging leaders and volunteer advocates in Oklahoma. These insights helped *Aging Our Way* leaders understand how the Plan can empower multisector partnerships, support current aging initiatives and solve issues related to aging identified by leaders and experts in the field. The listening session’s 32 participants represented multiple racial groups and ages.

Key Themes:

- *Aging Our Way* should support direct care workforce solutions to improve the quality and delivery of aging services.
- *Aging Our Way*’s initiatives should improve the ease of use and availability of aging services for older Oklahomans.
- *Aging Our Way* should include initiatives to incentivize employers to develop age-friendly workplaces, that help older adults stay vibrant in our workforce.

[What should we do to prepare for more older Oklahomans retiring and leaving the workforce?] “Incentivize people to go into health fields, pay them what they are worth, and maintain their work life balance.”

- **Listening Session Participant, Norman, 2024**

[What does a community that supports older Oklahomans look like to you?] “Systems should accommodate for personal needs of individuals.”

- **Listening Session Participant, Norman, 2024**

2.3 Community Health Wellness Center (Oklahoma City)

The [Community Health Wellness Center](#) provides older residents in northeast Oklahoma City with aging support services, meal services and social and recreational activities. Oklahoma Human Services engaged the OKC Black Chamber of Commerce to co-host a listening session at the Community Health Wellness Center to gain insights of Black Oklahomans. The majority of the listening session's 36 participants were older Black Oklahomans who attend the Community Health Wellness Center.

Key Themes:

- *Aging Our Way* should foster the coordination of aging services across the state to meet the full needs of older adults.
- Employers should promote flexible work options for seniors to support older adults in the workforce.
- *Aging Our Way* should support efforts to make services and technology more accessible to older adults.

“Everything feels like it is disjointed, services do not connect, curb to curb services stop and do not fully fulfill the needs of older Oklahomans.”

- **Listening Session Participant, Oklahoma City, 2024**

[How can we support older adults who want to remain in the workforce longer?] “Flexible schedules, and flexible shift hours.”

- **Listening Session Participant, Oklahoma City, 2024**

2.4 Latino Community Development Agency (Oklahoma City)

Oklahoma Human Services engaged La Puerta de Oro and the [Latino Community Development Agency](#) (LCDA) to gather the perspectives of Oklahoma’s Hispanic and Latino older adults. La Puerta de Oro is a program that provides a space for education, nutrition, recreation and social connection for those age 55 and older. The LCDA serves older Hispanic and Latino adults from across greater Oklahoma City. Oklahoma Human Services conducted the listening session in Spanish with 16 participants. Also in attendance were LCDA President Salvador Ontiveros, and Bernie Martinez, Director of La Puerta de Oro.

Key Themes:

- It is essential that older adults maintain connection to family and friends through social activities with peers and people across generations.
- Employers should promote learning opportunities for continual career advancement and growth, enabling personal goals such as retirement.
- Older adults should seek to incorporate exercise into their daily routine to maintain a healthy body and reduce health costs.

***[What is necessary for Oklahomans to maintain a healthy mind?]
“Pursuing and continuing activities such as: playing cards, painting, reading, sewing, and doing arts and crafts, all these activities are performed at Puerta de Oro.”***

- Listening Session Participant, Oklahoma City, 2024

[How can we support older adults who want to remain in the workforce longer?] Computer proficiency training and education, keeping up with changing technology.”

- Listening Session Participant, Oklahoma City, 2024

2.5 St. Luke's Methodist Church (Oklahoma City)

Faith leaders serve an important role in the lives of many older Oklahomans. The [Current State Report](#) and the statewide survey discussed below revealed that older Oklahomans often turn to their faith-based communities for volunteer opportunities, social connection and to identify and receive aging support. Oklahoma Human services hosted a listening session at [St. Luke's Methodist Church](#) to understand the work and perspectives of faith leaders serving older Oklahomans. The participants included five leaders in Oklahoma City congregations of varying sizes.

Key Themes:

- *Aging Our Way* should include efforts to centralize access to aging services and empower caregivers in care delivery.
- Participants expressed that aging preparedness services should make greater efforts to prepare older adults for the transition to retirement.
- Oklahoma Human Services identified faith-based leaders as potential partners for *Aging Our Way* implementation and initiative leaders for ongoing Plan support.

“A lot of people retire and are dead within 5 years, we need to prepare older adults about what they will do after they retire, people identify with what they do more than who they are, the lack of socialization and the lack of purpose is a heavy burden.”

- **Listening Session Participant, Oklahoma City, 2024**

“Putting resource booklets in the hands of faith-based leaders would be helpful, because faith-based leaders are getting calls and requests from older adults in their congregation about aging services.”

- **Listening Session Participant, Oklahoma City, 2024**

3.0 2024 Focus Areas Survey

The Multisector Plan on Aging Focus Area Survey was conducted from January 10 to March 15, 2024. The survey was developed in Qualtrics and was available online and in paper format. Online surveys were available to Oklahomans in all 77 counties and in 2 languages (English and Spanish). The English online survey was open for two months, from January 10 through March 15, 2024. The Spanish survey was open and collecting responses for a month, from February 14 through March 15, 2024.

The online versions of the survey were promoted on the Oklahoma Human Services' Multisector Plan on Aging website, news portals, and via text message. The web survey was composed of 35 questions. Additionally, QR codes were used to distribute the survey link at in-person events, such as tribal elder events and Senior Day at the Capitol. Paper surveys were only available in English. Some paper surveys were delivered to Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) for distribution to clients. Paper surveys were also available at Tribal Centers, Senior Centers and Senior Nutrition sites. The paper survey was composed of 26 questions. Paper surveys were also distributed at relevant events where Oklahoma Human Services staff were in attendance. Data entry for paper surveys began on February 26 and ended March 27, 2024. Due to the strategy for promoting the survey, it is impossible to calculate a response rate. However, a respectable 3,705 responses were received (English: n=3,063; Spanish: n=70).

Key Respondent Demographic Data

- 77% of respondents identified as 60 years or older (N=2,702).
- 79% of respondents identified as female (N=2,589).
- 79% of respondents identified as White (N=2,700).
- 4.5% of respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino (N=133).
- All 77 counties in Oklahoma were represented with at least 2 respondents from each county (Figure 3.0).
- 48% of respondents lived in rural areas (n=1,713), while 40% of respondents worked in rural areas (N=465).
- 10% of respondents identified as members of tribe (N=315).
- Of the 38 federally recognized tribal nations in Oklahoma, 25 were represented in the survey.
- Of respondents 60 years and older, 73% were retired (N=1,975), while 23% were employed or looking for employment (N=618).
- 30% of respondents indicated having a disability (N=966).

- 52% of respondents indicated an income category of less than \$50,000/year (N=1,719). 31% indicated an income category of \$50,000/year or more (N=1,002).
- Of 765 individuals under the age of 60, 43% claim to provide unpaid care to a family member or individual 60 years or older (N=325). Of those individuals receiving care, 56% are over the age of 75 (N=179).

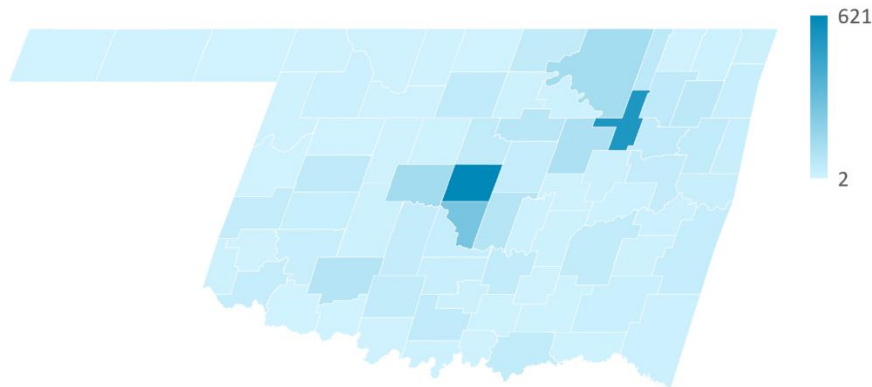


Figure 3.0 Heat Map Showing Distribution of Survey Respondents

Survey Highlights

Advanced statistical analyses were conducted on survey results. Three topics were found to be exceptionally important: socialization, remaining in the workforce and scheduling medical appointments. Significant measures for these topics were identified with the questions that follow.

- Socialization
 - “Which factors would enable the older adults (age 60+) you know to gather and socialize more with other people?”
 - Female respondents were more likely to indicate that transportation assistance and having someone to attend events with them would enable them to gather and socialize more with other people.
 - Respondents with disabilities were more likely to indicate a need for accommodations and more accessible events than respondents who did not report having a disability
 - “What barriers have you (or the person age 60+ you care for) experienced to participating in social activities?”
 - Respondents with disabilities were more likely to indicate that health limitations were a barrier to participation in social activities when compared to respondents who did not report having a disability.

- Black respondents were more likely to indicate cost was a barrier to participation in social activities when compared to white respondents.
- “What are the most effective supports for helping older adults (age 60+) remain in the workforce?”
 - Respondents with disabilities were more likely to indicate that the ability to work from home would allow older adults to remain in the workforce longer than respondents who did not report having a disability.
- “What are the most effective supports for helping unpaid caregivers remain in the workforce?”
 - Female respondents were more likely to indicate that the ability to work from home would enable unpaid caregivers to remain in the workforce.
 - Respondents with disabilities were more likely to indicate that caregiver compensation would enable unpaid caregivers to remain in the workforce, compared to respondents who did not report having a disability.
- “Which of the following types of doctors (or medical services) are most difficult for older adults (age 60+) to schedule?”
 - Female respondents were more likely to indicate that mental and behavioral health appointments are most difficult to schedule.

3.1 Age-Friendly Communities

Using an age-friendly lens, data on supportive services, events and other opportunities for older adults were evaluated. Results from the analysis are shown below.

- Respondents were asked what amenities existed in their town or community that support older adults. The six most common responses are visually represented in the figure below (Figure 3.1). Other responses included places that are accessible for people who use assistive devices, public transportation, age-friendly events and community opportunities and services provided by tribal nations (N=<950 each).

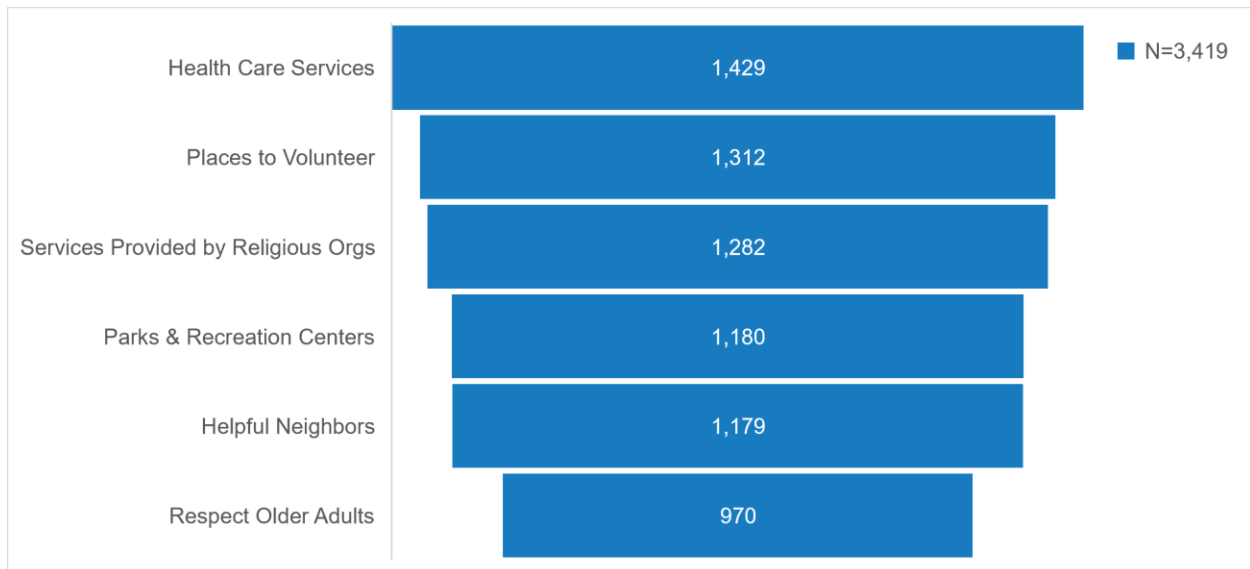


Figure 3.1 Top Six Ways Your Town/Community Supports Older Adults

3.2 Important Factors of Health & Availability of Health Services

Many of the critical factors influencing the health of older adults are closely connected to their overall well-being. Increasing the knowledge of and access to medical and mental health services can help meet the unique needs of older adults. Understanding these specific needs is crucial for developing strategies that promote healthy aging and improved healthcare outcomes for older adults in Oklahoma.

- 58% of respondents age 60+ did not know where to access mental health services if they want or need them (N=1,475).
- 49% of respondents age 60+ said that it was easy or very easy to get a doctor's appointment (N=1,271), and 32% of 60+ respondents said that it was hard or very hard to get in (N=810).
- 77% of respondents age 60+ said they are able to get an appointment with their Primary Care Physician within 2 weeks (N=1,949).
- For those who had difficulties scheduling doctor appointments, Specialty Care and Specialized Testing were the hardest appointments to schedule (51%; N=539), followed by Primary Care (26%; N=273) and Mental/Behavioral Health (14%; N=146).
- Respondents were asked to choose the three factors they felt were the most important for the health and well-being of older adults. The response distribution is shown in the figure below (Figure 3.2).

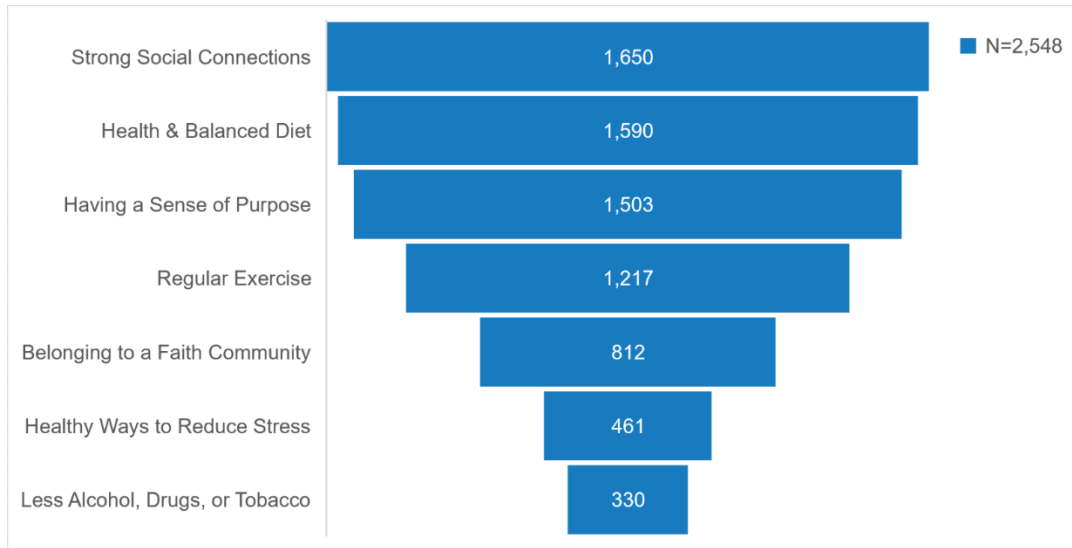


Figure 3.2 Most Important Factors for the Health of Older Adults

3.3 Social Connection

Social connection has a significant impact on health and happiness, particularly in older adults. Socialization, whether with family, friends or through religious or community activities, provides a sense of belonging and emotional support that are important for healthy aging. Factors like feeling connected to friends and family, having places in the community where older adults can gather and socialize and experiencing barriers to participating in social activities were analyzed. Understanding these factors is essential for fostering socialization and a more connected and supported aging experience.

- Respondents were asked about the places in their town/community where older adults could go to gather and socialize with people. The top five most common responses were: faith-based facilities (N=2,168), senior centers (N=2,134), meal sites and home-delivered meals (N=1,572), places for older adults to take classes or learn new skills/hobbies (N=1,075), and places with volunteer opportunities for older individuals (N=1,050).
- 78% of respondents age 60+ reported feeling connected to their friends and family who do not live with them (N=1,960).
- 36% of respondents age 60+ identified experiencing barriers to participating in social activities and events (N=1,029). The most common barriers were cost (N=679), health limitations (N=624), transportation

(N=553) and not feeling welcome or comfortable/not knowing anyone (N=477).

- Participants were asked what would enable older adults to gather and socialize more. The top six factors are visually displayed in the figure below (Figure 3.3).

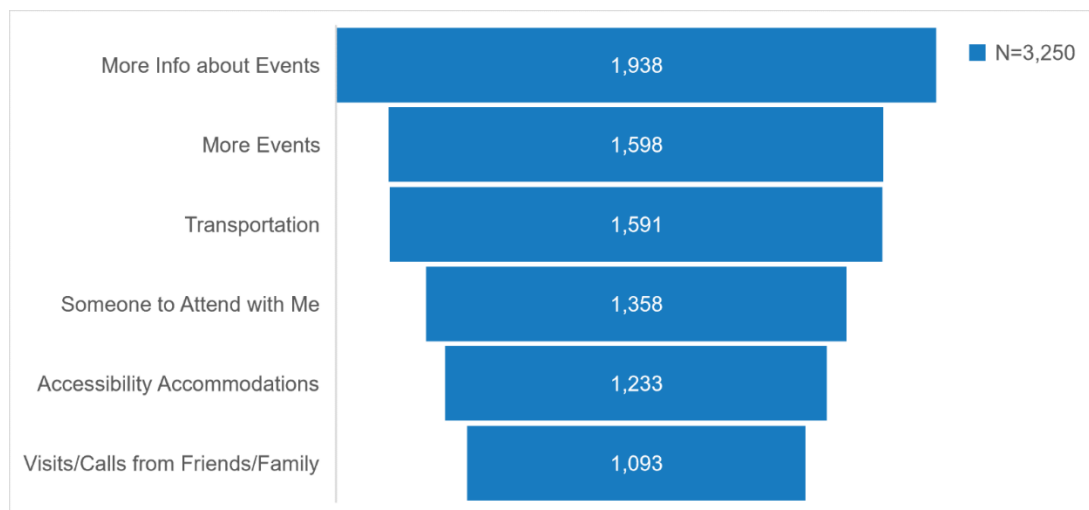


Figure 3.3 Top 6 Factors to Enable Older Adults to Gather & Socialize More

3.4 Culture Change & Education

The way a society views aging affects perceptions of older adults. Assessing views of growing older provides insight into how a society is supporting older adults currently, as well as areas where support is lacking. This part of the survey evaluated respondents' views of aging and how to best prepare for growing older. Fostering respect and inclusivity of older adults is possible through education and culture change.

- Survey respondents were asked if they agree with the following statement: 'Growing older provides opportunities for growth, happiness and making meaningful contributions to society.' Of respondents age 60+, 41% agreed (N=988) and 21% disagreed (N=500).
- Respondents were asked to identify the 3 most important things for helping people prepare for growing older. The figure below displays the eight most common responses (Figure 3.4). Other responses included developing new hobbies, staying in the workforce as long as they want/need, knowing when to purchase long-term care insurance and retiring as early as they want/need (N=<600 each).

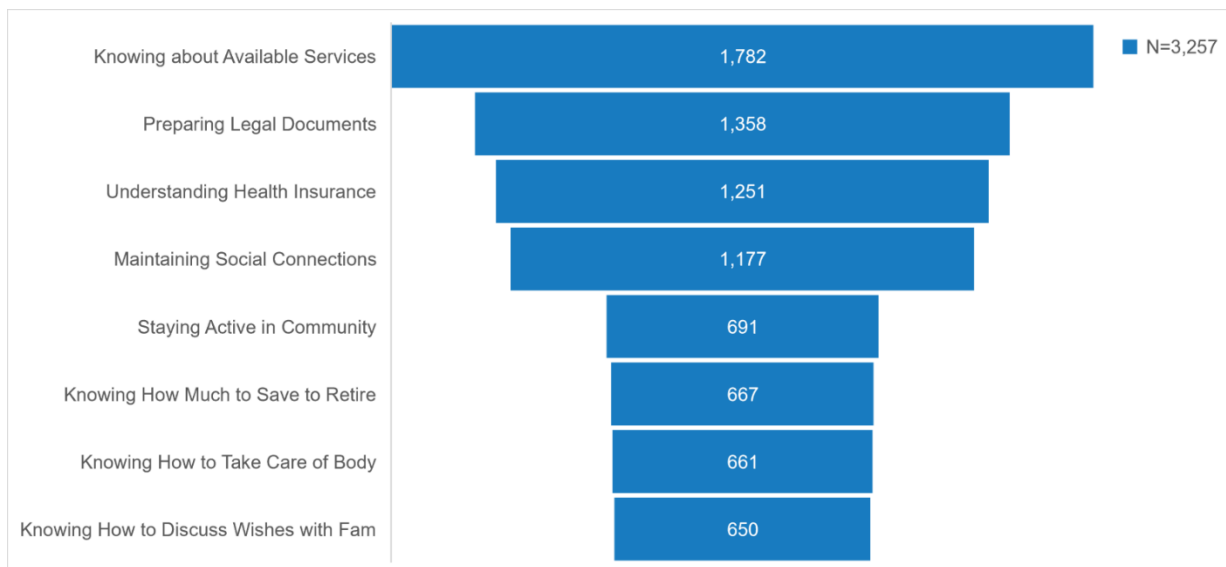


Figure 3.4 Top Eight Most Important Factors for Helping People to Prepare for Growing Older

3.5 Unpaid Caregivers and Workforce

Unpaid caregivers of older adults play a crucial role in supporting the aging population. Balancing the responsibilities of caregiving with employment can be incredibly challenging. Understanding how to support these essential caregivers ensures economic stability for them and their families while providing the critical care their loved ones need to thrive. Moreover, the decision of older adults to remain in the workforce for as long as they want or need depends on a wide range of factors. Findings from this analysis can inform policies and practices that better support working caregivers and older adults.

- Respondents were asked to identify the three most effective supports for helping unpaid caregivers remain in the workforce. The most common responses were caregiver compensation (19%; N=1,394), ability to work from home (15%; N=1,111) and flexible work schedules (12%; N=891).
- Of respondents age 60+, 50% said it was hard or very hard for older adults to stay in the workforce (N=1,216). Only 23% said it was easy or very easy (N=566).
- Of 60+ respondents, the five most common responses are visually represented in the figure below (Figure 3.5). Other responses include transportation to work and medical care near the workplace (N=<500 each).



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