



The U. S. population is aging.

Today, there are more than 46 million older adults, 65 years and older, and by 2050 that number is expected to exceed 90 million.¹ Between 2020 and 2030, as the last of the baby boomers reach the age of 65, the number of older adults is expected to increase by almost 18 million. By 2030, one in five of every Americans will be 65 years or older.¹

The issue of aging is especially important in rural areas because residents tend to be older than in urban areas. In 2010, 25 percent of all adults 65 and older lived in rural areas.¹ Aging populations lead to an increased need for health care, long-term care and social services that support older adults as they age. Older adults are often burdened with multiple chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, hypertension and depression.

What Does Healthy Aging in Place Look Like? Part One: Series Intro

By Lilly Anderson, MPH, DAFH Director, March 2022



According to the Rural Health Information Hub, nearly 90% of seniors want to stay in their homes as they age. The term ‘aging in place’ refers to the ability of older adults to remain in their homes and communities as they age, rather than relocating or moving into institutional settings. Aging in place promotes life satisfaction, a positive

quality of life, and improved self-esteem—all of which are crucial for older adults to remain healthy. When aging in place is supported, the entire community benefits. Older adults offer wisdom and perspective that help all of us to see the long game. Additionally, older adults tend to volunteer more, giving more often to the community than any other age group.²

Aging in place in rural communities comes with its own set of unique challenges. While rural communities are home to a higher proportion of older residents, rural communities provide fewer services such as, access to health care, housing, transportation and social and nutrition services. While rural areas offer many benefits, supporting aging in place may require more planning and coordination.

There are eight identified areas of program support services that most help people remain safe and actively engaged in their communities:

- Housing
- Legal assistance
- Telehealth/Home health services
- Caregivers/Caregiver well being
- Transportation programs
- Community Integration
- Community Support
- Design of Age Friendly Communities

Older adults and people with disabilities often experience physical limitations and need help with activities of daily living. This can be particularly challenging in rural areas. One of the questions we need to ask ourselves is what type of services and assistance are most needed to help older adults and those living with disabilities in rural areas.

According to *Home and Community Based Alternative to Nursing Home Care Journal*, there is a wide range of services that can help individuals live independently:

- Personal care services include help with bathing, dressing, eating and personal care including foot care.
- Household support services includes activities such as housekeeping, shopping, laundry and yard care.
- Nutrition services can include delivering meals, nutritional education, screening and counseling.
- Home health services including medical services prescribed by a physician.
- Transportation services that allow rural people to reliably get to healthcare and other services they need that allow them to buy nutritious foods and other items that promote good health.
- Home maintenance and modification services that provide affordable maintenance, repairs and disability modifications to single family homes.
- Care coordination services that make referrals to health and human services providers. These services often include helping individuals schedule appointments and pick up medications.
- Respite care support provides assistance to caregivers.

The ability to provide these services will be increasingly important moving forward with both higher older adult populations and the stressors brought on by climate change. While older adults

in rural areas often report larger social networks than their urban counterparts, they can also experience increased risk of social isolation and loneliness.

In fact, when we look at rural populations throughout the state of Oregon, we see a wide variety of services provided across the different regions. This spring and summer, I intend to begin visiting Granges in person to get a firsthand story of what services you feel are most needed in your district. So let me hear from you! Share your needs, problems and solutions. If you have a pressing issue you would like to see us explore, please feel free to contact me and let me know, as we begin our exploration of Healthy Aging Across Oregon.

References

- ¹Rural Hub of Information (RHI). Retrieved from: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/community-living#services>
- ²Program on Retirement Policy: Urban Institute, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/program-retirement-policy/projects/data-warehouse/what-future-holds/us-population-aging>
- ³Henning-Smith, A. et al., (2019). Differences in Social Isolation and Its Relationship to Health by Rurality. *J Rural Health*, Sep;35(4):540-549. doi: 10.1111/jrh.12344.