

Strategies and Resources Handbook 2014

Companion to CASOA™ Report of Results

CASOA™

**Community Assessment Survey
for Older Adults™**



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Introduction

With more than one-half of the Baby Boom generation now age 50 and older, the nation is increasingly becoming populated by older adults. One-third of the U.S. population reached this senior milestone in 2010. The graying of America can be understood in simple population counts. The number of people in the United States over the age of 65 is projected to more than double from 35 million in 2000, to 71 million in 2030. Additionally, a dramatic increase in the average age of the older population is expected. While 4.2 million persons were age 85 and older in 2000, further declines in mortality could lead to a five-fold increase in the number by 2040.¹

This bubble in the demographic charts is largely the Baby Boom generation, the cohort of 75 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964, the largest generation ever, grown in no small part because of the optimism and prosperity that followed WWII. In the year 2006, the first wave of the Baby Boom generation reached the age of 60.

The Baby Boom generation is beginning to enter older adulthood, creating a new disruption in social institutions akin to what occurred when they were younger: crowding hospitals, schools and colleges, transforming markets, trends and the workplace.² In their later years, Boomers likely will have a similar impact on retirement, health, housing, transportation, education, community and family life.³

The “demographic revolution” that began in 1946 is expected to result in a broad array of challenges and opportunities in the near future and will create a great shift in national priorities.² Trends that are apparent include:

- Advances in medical and related sciences, coupled with trends in exercise and healthy lifestyles suggest that people will not only live longer but the number of Americans who live up to and beyond 85 years of age will continue to grow⁴
- Older adults will be wealthier and better educated than past generations⁴
- Baby Boom retirees will have a stronger desire to make contributions beyond traditional retirement⁵
- People are likely to stay in the workforce longer than ever before⁶⁻⁸
- The older adult population will be more racially and ethnically diverse⁴
- The epicenter of economic and political power will shift from the young to the old⁴

How the increase in older Americans fully will affect society largely remains speculation. However, what is clear is that the current demographic trends are likely to change fundamentally the way older adult life is lived.

Aging not only occurs to nations and individuals, it happens to communities. Hoping for healthy older adults cannot transform the inevitable declines that most people face as they age. Even a healthier America will not avert the need to assist older adults who are frail. The Older Americans Act (OAA) currently supports a national aging services network that provides home and community-based services to over eight million older adults. Services provided by the network include home-delivered meals, nutrition education, transportation, adult day care, health promotion and the support of caregivers.⁹ But the OAA alone cannot meet the needs of those among the 75 million aging Baby Boomers who will press unprecedented demands on this country’s social services. More must be done and done by more actors. The traditional model of government service to needy recipients is unsustainable.

Therefore, much of the planning for this demographic swell must be led not just by Congress and national organizations, but by city councilors, Area Agency on Aging advisory boards, county commissioners, faith communities, service club members, college presidents, hospital administrators, business owners and community members. An aging world need not be a place where human resources diminish and productivity flags. With proper planning, communities filled with older adults can become centers of high quality human scale living, anchored by the contributions of civically engaged older residents.

American communities can choose a future that both protects vulnerable older adults and challenges those who thrive. A well-conceived and updated community will provide care to older adults that need it at the same time empowering older adults with far greater opportunities than exist now to age successfully and contribute. But not every community faces the same future nor do all older residents seek the same services. Whatever the unique needs in each community, one common circumstance will prevail. Resources will have to be reallocated. As populations age there will be changes in taste that will affect local news, arts, politics and even groceries, but needs that require more planning will emerge and anticipation of those needs will lead to communities that prosper because they are comfortable for and attractive to older adults.

In its monograph, “Active Living for Older Adults,” the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) calls for **involving “older residents early in the decision-making process,”**¹⁰ and to do that with, among other tools, surveys of older adults themselves. Older adult needs cannot be understood clearly without talking to older adults, so a statistically valid survey of older residents is essential to hear the voice of the people who are to be served. Your CASOA™ report offers a picture of community need that creates a model of local challenges and priority solutions. This handbook is designed to guide you in interpreting your survey results, so that challenges may be addressed and solutions realized that best fit the unique needs of your community.

Using the CASOA™ Handbook

The Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (CASOA™) provides a statistically valid survey of the strengths and needs of older adults as reported by older adults themselves in communities across America. Conducting CASOA™ is intended to enable local governments, community-based organizations, the private sector and other community members to understand more accurately and predict more carefully the services and resources required to serve an aging population. The report of results is available under separate cover and it shares the same structure as this handbook, based around six community dimensions:

- Overall Community Quality
- Community and Belonging
- Community Information
- Productive Activities
- Health and Wellness
- Community Design and Land Use

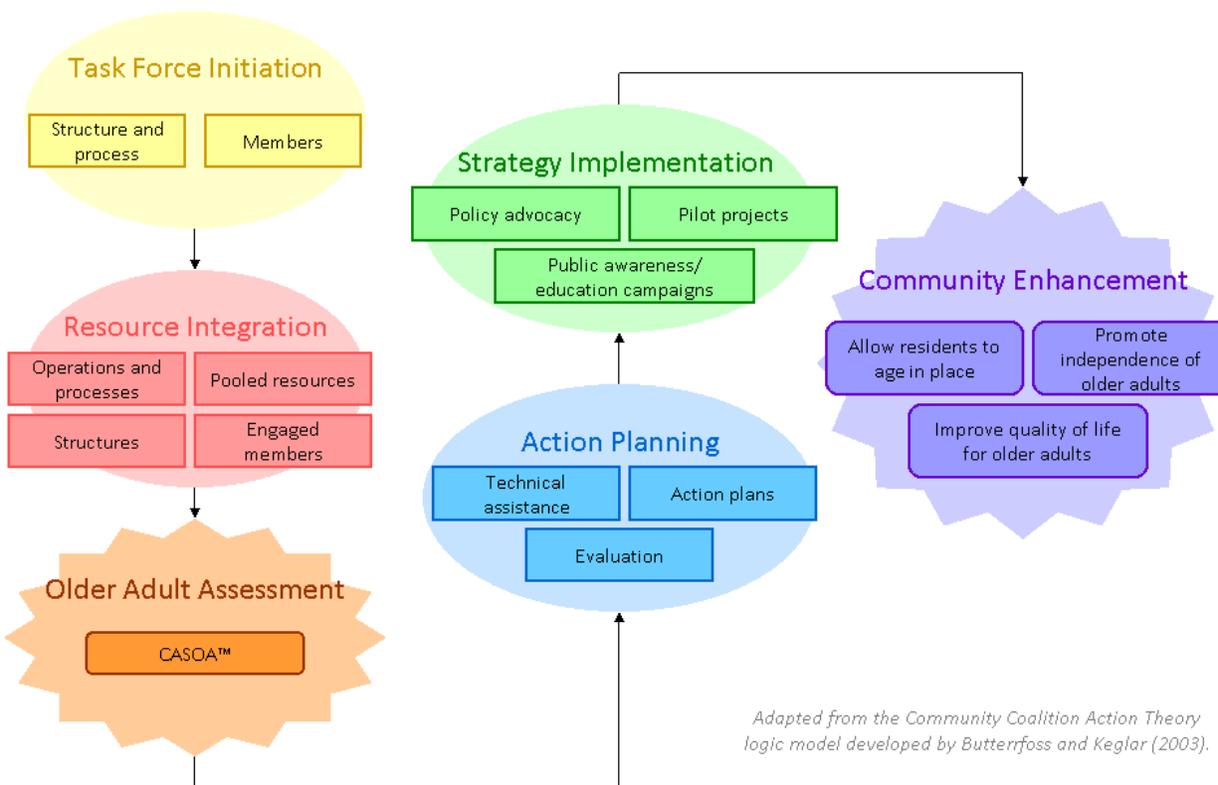
This handbook is designed to accompany a community’s CASOA report in order to facilitate better understanding and more effective implementation of the data. Each section of survey results in the report of results matches a section in this handbook that contains useful tips for interpreting and utilizing those results. Within each of these categories, communities may demonstrate vastly different areas of strength and need related to older adults. **Together, these strengths and needs provide a picture of a community’s “readiness” to support aging in communities in the coming years.**

Strategies for Livability

Overall Community Quality

Results that matter get acted upon, so a valuable step to help ensure that the results of this assessment are used is to establish or empower an existing older adult task force or coalition that can decide which of these results matter. Given the upcoming nationwide significant growth in the number of seniors, the need for collaboration is great among government, community-based organizations and the private sector. Whether large or small, coalitions help strengthen communities through developing planning capacity, increasing collaborative problem solving, promoting cooperation, developing advocacy capacity and increasing information access.¹¹ A model of how an older adult coalition or task force might proceed with CASOA™ data is presented in the figure below.

Figure 1: A Model of Older Adult Coalition Functioning



CASOA™ results can be used to develop an action plan that would identify areas for policy work, design public information campaigns and strategies to generate resources to fund pilot projects in the community. In addition, the consortium may have members or outside experts provide periodic lectures or host discussions on issues important to serving older adults, identifying trends in senior programming and the best practices to promote successful aging.

A coalition of older adults not only may serve as the vehicle by which recommendations for action arrive at the desk of staff and elected officials, but such a coalition offers an opportunity for its members to engage in relevant community service. Engaging with neighbors helps knit together a community of individuals, who, without that engagement, could face social isolation and the threat of dependency.

Community and Belonging

The connection with family members, friends, community members and organizations is a necessity for successful aging. Communities looking to increase the cohesiveness of networks for older residents might consider the following strategies.

1. Consider community design and land use policy to build community

Advocates argue the importance of community planning and land use to provide opportunities for civic life and activity. For more information on urban design guidelines that promote community building, see the Urban Design Advisory Service's *Seniors Living Policy: Urban Design Guidelines for Infill Development*,¹² *Livable Communities for Older People*,¹³ the *Beyond 50.50 Survey*¹³ and *How Age Friendly is Your Community?*¹⁴

2. Encourage neighborliness

The decline in neighborliness in American communities is one often discussed by those interested in social capital, community design and community safety. This decline also has profound effects on homebound seniors to whom neighbors used to provide significant social support. Some local governments and communities are trying to promote neighborliness through a variety of actions, including: 1) adopting community design policies related to new urbanism (e.g., porches, sidewalks and common spaces), 2) encouraging neighborhood watch programs and 3) generally promoting neighborhood interaction through activities such as social events and festivals, “ladies luncheons” and game nights, neighborhood pedometer challenges and clean-up programs. The Foundation of San Diego funds a program that provides grants to neighborhood groups to organize, run volunteer programs and provide services to community youth.¹⁵

3. Promote intergenerational programs

Multigenerational interaction and civic activity is on the decline in America.¹⁶ Strategies to involve older residents with younger community members can be effective not only to increase the social engagement of seniors but also to fulfill other community needs such as tutoring high-risk youth, providing after school care for latchkey kids, recruiting foster grandparents for special need children and more. Activities beyond multigenerational volunteerism also can be promoted, such as recreation, pen-pal programs, nursing home partners, and events such as “Grandparents’ day” at school. For more information on programs which develop intergenerational relationships and multigenerational volunteerism see the Maryland Intergenerational Coalition’s *How to Start Intergenerational Programs in Communities*¹⁷ and *Social Engagement: A Multi Generational Vision*.¹⁸

4. Create social resources for high-risk populations

Residents with serious health problems and those caring for them often cannot participate in many of the social opportunities existing in communities. Support groups and peer support

programs have become a successful tool used to mitigate many health and social issues including social isolation. One-on-one peer support programs for caregivers have been found to be effective and are increasingly promoted to reduce the isolation and depression of caregivers.¹⁹ Peer support also has been used to promote senior fitness and chronic disease management. Detailed strategies in peer support programs appear in *Report from NTAC's National Experts Meeting on Emerging New Practices in Organized Peer Support*.²⁰

In addition to peer support, caregiver respite programs also provide opportunities for older adults to gain social interaction. Caregiver respite has been a predominant issue in senior services for the past decade and will continue its prominence as the Baby Boomers begin to experience reductions in their ability to perform activities of daily living. Respite can be delivered through adult day care and drop-in-centers, in-home services, and out-of-home stays at community or medical facilities. A variety of resources are available for those planning respite programs including *Promising Practices Issue Brief*,²¹ *Respite Services of Caregivers*²² and *Respite Care: Probably Effective Practice. Outreach Strategies*.²³

Community Information

Many older residents express needs for general information and planning as well as for specific information about services offered to seniors and help with Social Security and Medicare. Financial and legal planning also are areas where a sizable number of older residents could benefit from community assistance. Communities interested in increasing community capacity for information and planning services might consider the following actions.

1. Increase public awareness of programs and services

Increasing older adult awareness of services may help decrease unmet needs as well as frustration when older adults look for information. Better information may promote quality of life when residents learn about opportunities such as health screenings and physical and social activities.

As local governments act to engage older adults in creating senior-friendly communities, it is essential to understand where residents learn about local affairs. Transmission of information represents half the effort in most successful communication relationships (reception representing the other half), so it is important to reach a large number of readers, viewers and listeners at the media fountain where they typically drink. Since there may be generational preferences in information sources,²⁴ maximize communication across a range of media by focusing resources on the outlets that attract the segments of older adults sought and save resources that otherwise would fund less effective sources.

Regional newspapers, the local newspaper, television and local government's newsletter represent important media for increasing awareness of local service opportunities and relevant policies. Working with employers and faith-based organizations can provide additional outlets for information flow.

2. Develop a clearinghouse for all services offered to seniors in community

There is need not only to increase knowledge about services offered by local governments but also information about services provided by other organizations. Valuable services are currently offered by private, public and nonprofit agencies with a lack of centralized location for people to find out about services (or without most local older adults being aware of that central

repository). Increasing knowledge about services to older adults may decrease the burdens placed on local government by spreading the demand among government and non-governmental agencies.

This information clearinghouse might be pursued best through the older adult task force or coalition recommended earlier. The goal would be to assemble an entire resource directory of all services for older adults offered in the community and also in nearby communities. Once completed, the directory should be available online as well as at each facility offering older adult services.

3. Offer information and planning activities on a large scale

Local governments and community-based nonprofits already offer information seminars, lectures and workshops on a variety of relevant quality of life topics for older adults – like estate planning, dealing with Medicare and improving health. Nevertheless, stepping up the number, frequency and dispersal of these live information offerings will reach more residents in need and help reduce needs in two ways: 1) by driving participants to service providers who can help to mitigate those needs and 2) by educating residents to solve by themselves the manageable problems they confront.

To maximize the dispersion of these information sessions, consider working with employers and faith-based communities to provide seminars and encourage information sharing and planning. “Resource kits” can be printed and distributed through community organizations to increase dissemination.

4. Go virtual

The Internet will become an even more important “connector” for Baby Boomers and subsequent generations. Although the benefits of virtual socialization are not as well established as the more traditional modes of interaction, the Web may hold promise for older residents with mobility issues and caregiving responsibilities.

Productive Activities

Older residents in many communities across the nation demonstrate significant needs in the area of civic engagement. Civic activity, whether it is through volunteering or participating in community decision-making, not only provides benefit to communities but also serves seniors themselves. Studies have found that volunteering in later life is associated with physical and functional health, lower injury rates and better psychological well-being. Those who volunteer are less likely to become injured or to die prematurely.²⁵

The power of older adults can be harnessed to the benefit of the community in the coming years. The literature on older adult civic activities finds that seniors are very well engaged in electoral participation (i.e., voting) and more engaged than the average American in volunteering and community service. It remains to be seen how Baby Boomers will compare to their older counterparts when it comes to making unpaid community contributions to society during their retirements. If a community seeks to increase the civic engagement of older residents, its decision makers may wish to consider a number of the following actions.

1. Actively promote senior volunteerism

Barriers, both real and perceived, to older adult volunteering include the difficulty of linking supply (volunteers) with demand (volunteer opportunities), insufficient public awareness about volunteer opportunities, workplace policies too inflexible to encourage employees to volunteer, insufficient transportation and ageism.²⁶ One basic and potentially powerful step to get older adults involved is simply to ask them.²⁷ A study found that older adults were five times more likely to volunteer if only they were invited.²⁸ The Corporation for National and Community Service Web site²⁹ lists effective practices on recruiting senior volunteers.

The oncoming wave of Baby Boomers has the potential to be the backbone of civic activity. The Center for Social Development suggests an “institutional capacity” perspective to leverage older adult engagement:

- Access: opportunities must be available that address barriers such as transportation, physical health, need for continued employment, lack of knowledge of a specific issue and lack of technological skills.
- Expectations: Community expectations can shape volunteerism. “Norming” can convey civic engagement as a societal obligation.
- Information: Public education about needs and contributions of older volunteers can be beneficial and help shape the expectations of younger adults for their retirement years.
- Incentives: Older adults are most interested in volunteer work that gives them “a chance to give back,” utilizes skills and shows impact.
- Facilitation: A range of activities can help recruit and sustain older volunteers including orientation, readings, computer training and other education. Sometimes financial incentives are used to facilitate volunteerism through minimal stipends or tax credits.³⁰

To increase older adult volunteerism, communities might pursue a number of the following promising practices:

- Offer incentive programs to increase volunteerism.
- Governments can incent volunteerism through a number of incentive programs including travel reimbursements³¹ and tax credits/abatement.³²
- Develop an online clearinghouse of volunteer opportunities.³³
- Support program and services that facilitate the exchange of non-cash incentives³⁴ and “time banking” opportunities.³⁵
- An increasingly popular model to encourage community engagement and resource sharing is “time-banking” whereby residents “pay it forward” by assisting folks in need while they are able in return for services provided them at a later date.
- Support innovative programs including the Volunteer Generation Fund,³⁶ Encore fellowships,³⁷ Experience Corps³⁷ and Silver Scholarships.³⁷

The New York State Commission on National and Community Service has created a summary of recent literature on the best practices in older adult volunteerism in the white paper: NGA Policy Academy on Civic Engagement Older Adults, Baby Boomers, and Volunteerism Annotated Bibliography.³²

It takes dedicated resources to have a quality volunteer program, often with a volunteer coordinator and record-keeping functions. These costs should not be underestimated. It is likely

that funding opportunities will be increasingly available in the area of volunteerism and organizations and governments must be ready to apply for those funds. Often, funding for volunteer programs are simply not adequate to cover all program activities, so partners should consider collaboratively sharing resources for community-wide volunteer efforts.

2. Consider the social and leisure interests of Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers express a wider range of interests than those in the generations before them and tend to be less attracted to activities associated with senior citizens (including senior centers themselves).³⁸ Senior centers and programs need to adapt to the new attitudes and interests of the young-old as they can continue to offer social engagement opportunities for older residents. In a study by the Ohio Department of Aging, Baby Boomers were found to be more interested in travel, computers, fitness, cultural events and continuing education than residents in the 65 to 70 year age range. The greatest discrepancies between Baby Boomer interest and current senior center programming were in the areas of gardening and sports (participation and viewing) – where Baby Boomers reported an interest greater than the number of programs being offered.³⁸

3. Increase participation of older residents in local governing and community decision-making

As local governments consider the diversity of their planning boards and oversight committees, the age of participants should become one of the diversity criteria. As communities age, there will be a natural accumulation of older adults who may be interested in serving. Older adults will need to be made aware of the opportunities to contribute. Sometimes special accommodation may need to be made to permit an older adult with the motivation but without the mobility or physical health to become civically engaged.

Health and Wellness

Good health rarely comes without effort. Public health literature clearly shows the benefits that come from physical activity, nutrition, cognitive exercise and preventive healthcare but the lifestyles that support these choices must be encouraged and nurtured. Opportunities to promote healthy lifestyles can come from public policies that require walk-friendly streetscapes to programs that bring to grocery stores fresh local fruits and vegetables to diabetes prevention trainings.

Nationally, significant efforts have been made to promote wellness through healthier living (e.g., Healthy People 2020) and older adults face many of the same lifestyle challenges that are faced by other community members. Still, the geriatric literature offers scores of reports about senior health promotion practices. Health promotion and continued prevention of chronic disease aid in maintaining the quality of life of older residents. Strategies to help seniors stay healthy include the following.

1. Consider community design features to promote active living in communities

Much is published about the importance of the built environment and its role in promoting physical activity. A recent review of literature on environmental factors that affect physical activity has found many significant associations between health and the accessibility of facilities, opportunities for physical activity, pedestrian-friendly street plans³⁹ and safety.⁴⁰ Focusing on community planning and design features that emphasize concepts of New Urbanism and Smart Growth may have strong impacts not only on older adult physical activity but also on traffic, environmental quality, community safety and opportunities for building social capital.⁴¹⁻⁴⁴ For

more information on planning communities that promote active aging, see the Partnerships for Prevention's guide: *Creating Communities for Active Aging*,⁴⁵ the Active Living Leadership's *Primer on Active Living for Government Officials*⁴⁶ and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's *Leadership for Healthy Communities*.⁴⁷

2. Pursue policies encouraging universal design and senior housing options that require less maintenance burden

As with many of the other need areas for older residents, creating or modifying zoning and building codes to promote universal design features and allow for more flexible housing choices will reduce the amount of services needed to modify and maintain senior homes for future generations of older residents.

3. Pursue programs that will attract medical providers and facilities to the region

A variety of programs have been developed to attract medical providers to areas where compensation does not square with living costs. Loan repayment programs, training scholarships and housing credits are incentive programs that might be pursued. Some communities provide incentive to attract physicians interested in Locum Tenens (temporary or "moonlighting" work).

4. Coordinate medical services across adjacent communities.

There are many preventive services provided throughout a given region, although not all communities may be equal in what is available. Greater collaboration between government agencies via discussions, task forces, MOUs, etc., could assist in aiding areas where less service is provided.⁴⁸ Resource sharing and regional coordination can aid in providing service to areas where the population density and geography preclude adequate access.

5. Improve access to screenings and programs for depression, anxiety and Alzheimer's/dementia

Programs for mental health can be provided not only by mental health centers. Recreation centers, faith-based organizations and the offices of medical doctors offer opportunities to test older adults' cognitive abilities and symptoms of depression, anxiety, Alzheimer's/dementia and substance abuse. Health fairs can include written screening tests for signs of dementia and for symptoms of other mental health problems.⁴⁹ In brochures, on Web sites or in media broadcasts, candid communication from local government, Area Agencies on Aging and other organizations about the prevalence of mental health problems associated with aging will reduce the stigma associated with admitting problems or reporting them when suspected by friends and family. Where such reporting should occur and the likely steps that follow self-report or reporting by others must be widely disseminated to older residents and other adults in the area.⁵⁰

6. Actively promote good health practices

Awareness of and support for the implementation of four strategies that have proven effective in promoting the health of older adults may continue to help keep older adults healthy: 1) Healthy

lifestyle promotion (physical activity, eating a healthy diet, not using tobacco, etc.), 2) Early detection of disease (health screenings, regular checkups, immunizations), 3) Injury prevention (e.g., housing modifications) and 4) Promotion of self-management techniques (e.g., arthritis self-help course).⁵¹

Understanding specifically what older residents see as opportunities missed for their health care needs will provide details about the interventions that will be successful. Are current facilities or preventive services too few, not welcoming, poorly located or too expensive? What kind of preventive services are desired that do not seem to be available – screening fairs, in-office tests? For what kinds of mental health issues do residents encounter barriers to treatment – isolation, depression, anxiety, the costs of treatment, the stigma of care? These are the kinds of questions that can be answered with guided discussions whose purpose is to understand more fully the depth of health problems with which older residents cope.

7. Promote access to fruits, vegetables and healthy eating choices

Food security refers to the ability to access, at all times, enough food for an active, healthy life.⁵² Nationally, more than 2.5 million households with seniors are estimated to be “food insecure”⁵³ and the rate of food insecurity triples for elders in poverty.⁵² Nationally, food insecure seniors were 2.3 times more likely to report fair/poor health status and had higher nutritional risk than their younger counterparts.⁵⁴ However, communities can make a difference. In a study of 17 community-led health programs, communities that provided greater access to fresh produce showed greater increases in resident fruit and vegetable consumption.³⁹ Innovative programs to promote healthful eating for older residents include: 1) Senior Community-supported Agriculture (CSA) projects (a strategy that allows senior consumers to purchase shares of a local farmers harvest), 2) “farm to institution” programs where local farmers deliver produce for cafeterias of hospitals, nursing homes and assisted living facilities and 3) the USDA funded Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program.⁵⁵ Information on projects aimed at increasing the food security of seniors appears at WhyHunger (www.whyhunger.org) and Feeding America (www.feedingamerica.org) and more information on food security issues and older adults is on America’s Second Harvest Fact sheet on Senior Hunger.⁵⁴ In addition to these resources, the USDA has produced a food security toolkit that provides a series of tools to help communities assess their food security and target areas and populations in need.⁵⁶

8. Provide attractive fitness opportunities for older residents

When seniors lose the ability to do things on their own, it usually does not happen simply because they age. More often it is because they have become inactive. It is estimated that 46% of people aged 65-74 and 56% of people 75 and older are sedentary.⁵⁷ An article in the *Journal of Active Aging* reports: “The biggest message to bring across is that with every increasing decade of age, people become less and less active; but the evidence shows that with every increasing decade, exercise becomes more important in terms of quality of life, independence and having a full life. So as of now, Americans are not on the right path.”¹⁴ Research fuels new physical activity recommendations for older adults.⁵⁸

Some promising programs to get older residents moving include: pedometer or walking programs; outdoor recreation opportunities such as hiking, biking, bird watching; mind-body exercises such as Pilates and yoga; and organized events such as races and triathlons uniquely for seniors. Other fitness programs for seniors are provided in the American Society on Aging’s *Live Well, Live Long: Steps to Better Health Series*.⁵⁹ Not only should these programs be promoted actively through recreation and senior centers but also through employers, schools,

faith communities and other community-based organizations. Programs aimed not only at seniors will help to establish good habits among young people, too, and may diminish obesity and sedentary behavior across all ages.

9. Promote senior home assessments

Identifying the safety and fall hazards of older residents' homes not only educates the homeowners but helps target high-risk individuals for interventions. A number of assessment tools are provided at the National Center for Supportive Housing and Home Modification Web site: www.Homemods.org. Energy audits can identify savings that also enhance the likelihood that older adults will be able to remain in their homes.

10. Support home modification and repair services

Most of America's existing housing stock was built before "universal design" was considered desirable or profitable. (Universal housing design requires builders to consider the needs of residents as they age. This results in no-step entries, wider corridors and interior doorways and level handles for easy door opening.) Thus, services that retrofit senior homes with safety features such as grab-bars, handrails and ramps can be funded by local governments or approached as organized volunteer activities to help compensate for housing stock that is less "senior-friendly." "Handy worker" programs to provide routine maintenance to homes is also popular among communities. The University of Southern California provides a *National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification* which lists resources and programs by state.⁶⁰ Additionally, the National Center for Supportive Housing and Home Modification sponsors a Web site which provides online education to builders, planners, non-profit staff and policymakers on universal design, home modification assessment tools, adaptive technology, funding sources for home modification and more.⁶¹

The success of the "Adopt-a-highway" programs has spurred the adoption of all types of public goods (e.g., rainforests, schools, beaches, libraries) as well as population groups or public areas in need (high-risk youth, soldiers, low-income families, minefields). Organizations can be enlisted to support "adopt-a-senior" projects to help keep older residents independent. Local governments can encourage the community and particularly community organizations such as employers, faith-based groups and youth to provide needed services such as yard work, painting and snow shoveling.

11. Promote housekeeping services

Although housekeeping services are offered by the private sector and some government organizations, those services generally are offered only to residents with the financial wherewithal to afford them or to those with serious health problems and often are limited to specific rooms in the home (e.g., just the kitchen or bedroom) and for specific activities (e.g., sheet changing, cleaning of bathrooms used by frail seniors). When an older resident becomes too frail even to vacuum or do laundry, others need to provide the service to permit the senior to remain in the home. In the absence of regular housekeeping services, not only will older adults face consequences to their health, but they will be more likely to remain isolated, determined not to let neighbors or even relatives enter an unkempt home.

Transportation and mobility issues afflict most areas where adults are growing old; many studies have been undertaken and many recommendations made regarding the need for more public transportation and increased mobility options. Older adults too often ignore physical

impairments that should sideline them from their role as driver, so as the population ages, roads will become more dangerous without attractive alternatives to the car. Solutions to these complex problems can include, as examples, programs that mitigate the need for older adults to travel – such as delivery services, online shopping and virtual in-home health care; programs that offer inexpensive on-call or frequent shuttle service and more.

Community Design and Land Use

The health and well-being of older adults cannot rest only on the shoulders of older adults themselves. Older adults at the center of several collaborative opportunities can improve the environment for seniors. Community land use design is a central mechanism by which the quality of life of older adults can be sustained and improved. In the absence of thoughtful strategies and intentional plans, American communities have tended to be built in sprawling pieces like shattered mirrors that reflect little attention to efficiency of movement, diversity of housing choice or interconnectedness of neighbors. Most suburbs have been developed by the draw of inexpensive land and for the competencies of automobiles. Better community designs create “livable” communities, which offer smaller street widths to encourage healthy outdoor activities such as walking and bicycling, more abundant and more affordable housing options to maximize diversity and better connection with neighbors to foster safety and build social capital.

Availability and costs of appropriate housing can be a significant barrier to older adults trying to age in place. Although housing costs are largely determined by supply and demand, communities seeking reductions to housing cost burden for older residents might want to consider the following practices.

1. Work with elected officials and community planners to consider community designs that obviate the need for a car

New Urbanist and Smart Growth community design principles that promote community walkability, affordable housing and multi-use development provide settings where older residents are not automobile reliant. For more information on urban design guidelines, see *1. Consider community design and land use policy to build community*, p. 4.

2. Consider zoning regulations that encourage affordable housing options

Zoning regulation and development fees often can discourage the production of affordable housing. Modifying these policies to incent mixed-use, high-density and/or infill developments can help create housing stock with lower cost burden to seniors. The Urban Land Institute has produced a 2005 guide “Best Practices in the Production of Affordable Housing” which discusses issues with predevelopment, financing and sustainability and growth⁶² and a 2002 report from the Commission on Affordable Housing and Health Facilities Needs for Seniors in the 21st Century provides a list of best practices in affordable senior housing.⁶³

3. Partner with developers and builders to provide affordable senior housing projects

Local governments have partnered with developers to provide fee waivers and other development cost reductions for new housing projects that are more affordable for older adults.

Standard requirements for street widths, schools, water mains and maximum densities have been modified to account for the different footprint that older adults leave on a community. Revised development policies can enhance new development opportunities to accommodate older adults.

4. Develop programs that reduce housing costs

Popular senior housing programs that reduce the cost of housing include real estate tax relief or deferral, home energy assistance, senior homeowner exemption and rent increase exemption.

5. Develop “time bank” or other volunteer programs to support senior transportation

In rural and suburban areas, the most cost-efficient way to provide rides is through the use of other residents (family, friends, neighbor and volunteers). Programs encouraging ride sharing and matching can provide to seniors lacking adequate transportation options.

Final Thoughts

The Older Americans Act (OAA) currently supports a national aging services network that provides home and community-based services to over eight million older adults. Services provided by the network include home-delivered meals, nutrition education, transportation, adult day care, health promotion and the support of caregivers.⁹ With many social service agencies already under strain,⁶⁴ meeting the needs of an additional 76 million aging Baby Boomers will require a new way of thinking about services for older Americans. There are limitations to continued success that need to be addressed before the full force of the growth in the number of older adults hits.

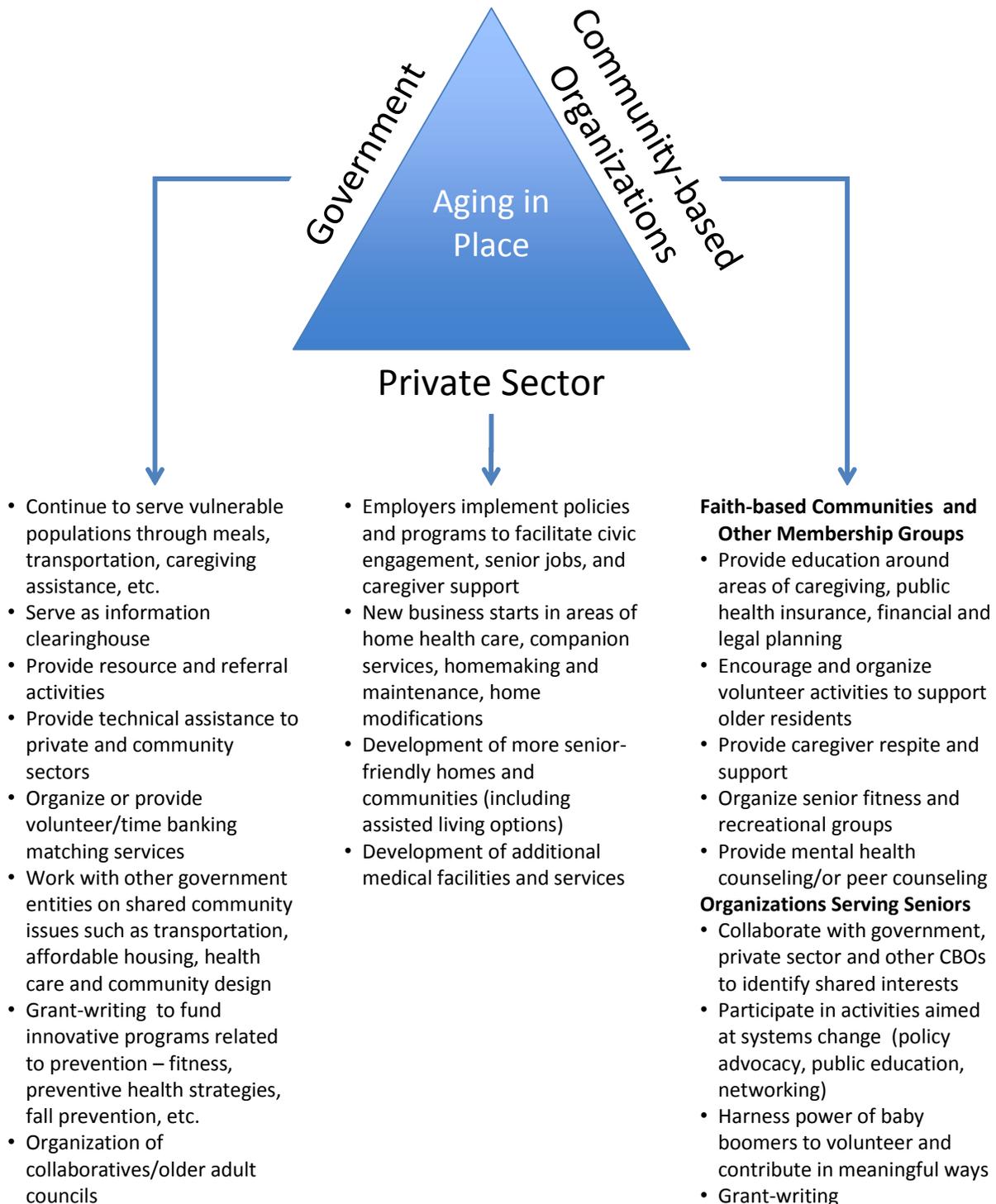
More present work must be done and done by more actors. The model of service to needy older adults, built primarily on the policies and funding of the federal government, is unsustainable. Figure 2 presents many of the actions that might be taken by the various sectors in a community. Therefore, much of the planning for this demographic swell must be led not just by Congress and national organizations, but by city councilors, Area Agency on Aging advisory boards, county commissioners, faith communities, service club members, college presidents, hospital administrators, business owners and community members. An aging world need not be a place where human resources diminish and productivity flags. With proper planning, communities filled with older adults can become centers of high quality human scale living, anchored by the contributions of civically engaged older residents. Imagine communities filled with older adults who have the wherewithal to purchase consumer goods and services, participate in local politics, learn new skills, live at home, harm no one, share their accumulated wisdom, help their neighbors, broker their talents – in short, imagine a healthy group of civically engaged adults who take little or only what they truly need and give a lot.

American communities can choose a future that both protects vulnerable older adults and challenges those who thrive. A well-conceived and updated community will provide care to older adults that need it at the same time empowering older adults with far greater opportunities than exist now to age successfully and contribute. But not every community faces the same future nor do all older residents seek the same services. Older adults in your community face many of the same issues as seniors across the nation – housing, transportation and health care.

Whatever the unique needs in each community, one common circumstance will prevail. Resources will have to be reallocated. As populations age there will be changes in taste that will affect local news, arts, politics and even groceries, but needs that require more planning will emerge and anticipation of those needs, rather than surprise confrontation, will lead to communities that prosper because they are comfortable for and attractive to older adults. As with the rest of the nation, your community will need to plan strategically for the aging of its residents. This report provides the foundation for beginning this ongoing strategic planning.

A periodic sounding of your community's older adults will provide ongoing assessment of the progress made as the spring of older adults bubbles into the community. Conducting the CASOA™ puts your community vastly ahead of most communities in the U.S. because planning for the coming wave of older adults most often is accomplished by the assertions of hard working service providers, who, despite their commitment to the well-being of older adults, cannot speak as articulately for older adults as older adults can speak for themselves.

Figure 2: Service Opportunities by Community Sector



An AARP executive noted about America's aging:

It would be hard to overstate the significance of these shifts... But from here on, every planning decision made in every community must take into account the impact on older residents, who can no longer be an afterthought. The ability of our institutions to adapt to an aging nation will be one of the great American challenges of the 21st century.⁶⁵

As the Baby Boomers are just beginning to reach beyond age 65, their communities are struggling with the best next steps to prepare for that generation when it hits 70, then 80 and older. This is the right time for developing solid strategies that become the platforms on which to build societal change because soon, planning will have to be joined with action. How America treats its older adults will define our nation. This is our challenge as we reach toward the twenty-second Century.

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