

What is Age Friendly Minnesota?

Launched in 2019 as part of an AARP initiative, Age-Friendly Minnesota is a collaborative statewide effort to make our systems and communities more inclusive of and responsive to older adults. Age-Friendly communities seek to create or adapt environments where older individuals can thrive, which ultimately benefits everyone.

“We love the inclusiveness of this community. We love the natural spaces that are available to us. We love people’s willingness to help and level of engagement.”

-Community Listening Session Participant

The Age-Friendly Process

In 2023, Cook County Public Health and community collaborator Care Partners received a grant from Age-Friendly Minnesota to gather insights from our community and help us decide if it makes sense to pursue an Age Friendly designation. Over the course of four months, we received community input through an eighty-six-question survey and ten listening sessions held throughout Cook County. We asked people to evaluate the livability of our community in nine key areas or domains:



Civic Participation and Employment



Health Services and Community Supports



Communication and Information



Transportation



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings



Housing



Social Participation



Respect and Social Inclusion



Disaster Preparedness

Community Participation

Cook County residents demonstrated a high level of community engagement in the information-gathering phase of the Age Friendly process. 240 people responded to our in-depth needs assessment survey and 90 people attended community forums either in person or online.

Community Listening Sessions were held in:

- Birch Grove Community Center
- Cook County YMCA
- Grand Marais Public Library
- Grand Portage Community Center
- Hovland Town Hall
- Lutsen Town Hall
- Schaap Community Center
- Schroeder Town Hall
- Seagull Lake Community Center
- Online via Zoom



Why are we involved?

Older adults represent a large, vibrant, and growing segment of our population. According to the US Census Bureau, nearly 36% of Cook County’s residents are at least 60 years old! Participation in the Age Friendly network provides a positive way to bring people of all ages together and an organizing structure to get work done. It can also send a strong signal to grantors and other benefactors that our community is committed to the work of collaboration and growth.

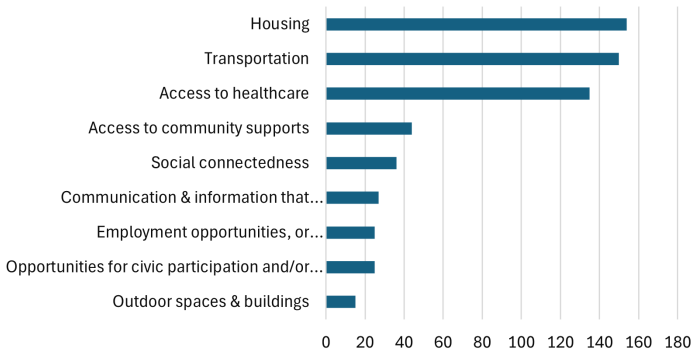
The “Big Three”

Surveys and community forums consistently identified the strongest desire for improvement in three domains:

- Housing
- Health Services & Community Supports
- Transportation

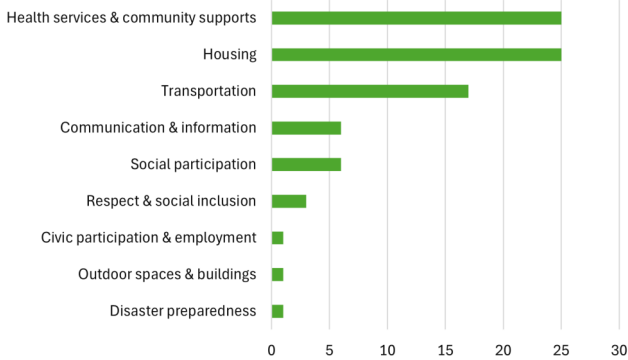
Survey question 19: When you think about your community as a place for people to live as they age, which of the following community areas need the most improvement? Please select up to three.

Responses to Survey Question #19



Community Forum attendees were asked to choose the 2-3 domains that were most important to them personally.

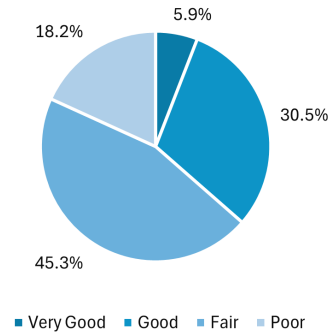
Total Number of Choices for Each Domain



Age Friendly Cook County Board Presentation Team (left to right); Andrea Tofte (Cook County Public Health), Grace Grinager (Cook County Public Health), Georgia Lane (Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging), Julie Wilson (Care Partners)

Over half of respondents rated Cook County as a “fair” or “poor” place for people to live as they age.

18. How would you rate your community as a place for people to live as they age?



What We’ve Learned

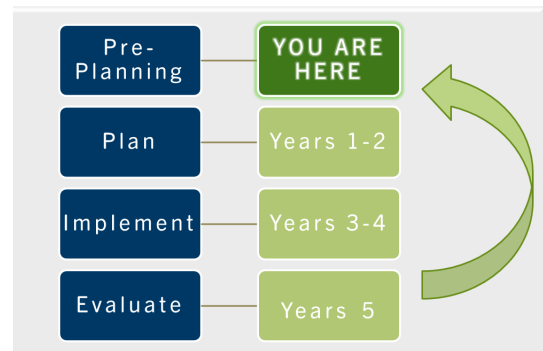
In listening to a diverse range of residents in Cook County through surveys and community forums, it was clear that respondents are a resilient group of people who love their community and the opportunities it provides for staying engaged, active and aging well.

The domains that rose to the top in this work were Health Services & Community Supports, Housing and Transportation – all align with our 2023-2027 Community Health Assessment. These results will help inform our continued, collaborative Age-Friendly work throughout Cook County.

Thank you for trusting us with your stories, experiences and hopes for the future. We look forward to continuing this work with you as we look for creative ways to further inspire positive aging across our beautiful county.

What’s Next

A formal request for resolution and commitment to join the Age Friendly Communities network was made and unanimously approved at the April 16, 2024 meeting of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. Age Friendly Minnesota has provided a grant extension to develop collaborative strategies that address issues we’ve identified through the community surveys and listening sessions.



For more information or to schedule an Age Friendly Cook County presentation for your or group, business, or organization, contact Care Partners Executive Director Julie Wilson (218.387.3788) or Cook County Public Health Educator Andrea Tofte (218.387.2630)