

**Area 7 Agency on Aging
and Disabled
West Central Indiana Economic
Development District
2013
Report Highlights**



**Community Assessment Survey
for Older Adults™**



2955 Valmont Road, Suite 300 • Boulder, Colorado 80301
www.n-r-c.com • 303-444-7863

Introduction

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. Used in conjunction with the CASOA Strategies and Resources Handbook (provided under separate cover), CASOA is intended to enable local governments, community-based organizations, the private sector and other community members to understand more thoroughly and predict more accurately the services and resources required to serve an aging population. With this report, Area 7 Agency on Aging and Disabled West Central Indiana Economic Development District stakeholders can shape public policy, educate the public and assist communities and organizations in their efforts to sustain a high quality of life for older adults. The objectives of the CASOA are to:

- Identify community strengths in serving older adults
- Articulate the specific needs of older adults in the community
- Estimate contributions made by older adults to the community
- Determine the connection of older adults to the community

The results of this exploration will provide useful information for planning and resource development as well as strengthen advocacy efforts and stakeholder engagement. The ultimate goal of the assessment is to create empowered communities that support vibrant older adult populations.

The CASOA questionnaire contains many questions related to the life of older residents in the counties served by Area 7 Agency on Aging and Disabled West Central Indiana Economic Development District (Clay, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan, Vermillion and Vigo Counties). Survey participants were asked to rate their overall quality of life, as well as aspects of quality of life in West Central Indiana. They also evaluated characteristics of the community and gave their perceptions of safety. The questionnaire assessed the individual needs of older residents and involvement by respondents in the civic and economic life of West Central Indiana.

Area 7 Agency on Aging and Disabled West Central Indiana Economic Development District CASOA Methods

The CASOA survey and its administration are standardized to assure high quality survey methods and comparable results across communities. Participating households with residents 60 years or older were selected at random and the household member who responded was selected without bias. Multiple mailings gave each household more than one prompt to participate with a self-addressed and postage-paid envelope to return the survey. Results were statistically weighted to reflect the proper demographic composition of older adults in the entire community.

The survey was mailed in March 2013 to a random selection of 1,500 older adult households in Clay, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan, Vermillion and Vigo Counties as well as the City of Terre Haute in Vigo County. Older adult households were contacted three times about participation in the survey. A total of 393 completed surveys were obtained, providing an overall response rate of 27% and a margin of error of plus or minus 5% around any given percent and three points around any given average rating for the entire sample.

For more methodological information, refer to the full report of results, available under separate cover.

Figure 1: CASOA Methods and Goals



Structure of CASOA Report

This report is based around six community dimensions (Figure 2):

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

Each section discusses older adult ratings of the community, participation in activities and potential problems faced by older adults as related to each of the six dimensions. The final section of the report, Community Readiness, summarizes these dimensions as index scores and provides an overall picture of West Central Indiana as a livable community for older adults.

Figure 2: Community Dimensions Assessed through CASOA



Key Findings

Not all older adults complain, nor does every community leave older adults raving about the quality of community life or the services available for active living and aging in place. Communities that assist older adults to remain or become active community participants provide the requisite opportunities for recreation, transportation, culture, education, communication, social connection, spiritual enrichment and health care.

Older adults, more than others, face difficulties with aspects of everyday life. For many older adults these difficulties vastly exceed the minor physical pains or small losses of function that characterize almost everyone's circumstances after a certain age. When individual problems are added together, through responses to the CASOA survey, a group picture emerges that provides a useful description of the entire community.

The results of this survey describe West Central Indiana as a livable community for older adults within six community dimensions of Overall Community Quality, Community and Belonging, Community Information, Productive Activities, Health and Wellness and Community Design and Land Use. The extent to which older adults experience difficulties and problems within these dimensions is also described.

Overall Community Quality

Overall Community Quality explores how older residents view the community overall, how connected they feel to the community and how well they can access information and services offered in the Area 7 Agency on Aging and Disabled West Central Indiana Economic Development District, as well as how likely residents are to recommend and remain in the community.

- Most older residents in the West Central Indiana area gave high ratings to the community as a place to live.
- Almost three-quarters of older adults said they would recommend their community to others.
- Three-quarters of respondents had lived in the community for more than 20 years and over 9 in 10 planned to stay in the area throughout their retirement.

Community and Belonging

A “community” is often greater than the sum of its parts, and having a sense of community entails not only a sense of membership and belonging, but also feelings of emotional and physical safety, trust in the other members of the community and a shared history.¹ Older residents of West Central Indiana rated several aspects of Community and Belonging, including their sense of community and overall feelings of safety, as well as the extent to which they felt accepted and valued by others.

- Almost two-thirds of respondents reported “excellent” or “good” overall feelings of safety and between 7% and 12% had experienced safety problems related to being a victim of crime or abuse.
- About 43% of older residents rated the sense of community as “excellent” or “good”; similar ratings were provided for the area’s neighborliness.

Community Information

Keeping a large community of older adults informed is not simple, but when more residents are made aware of attractive, useful and well-designed programs, more residents will benefit from becoming participants.

- About 57% of survey respondents reported being somewhat or very informed about services and activities available to older adults.
- About one-quarter of older adults felt the agency had “excellent” or “good” information about resources for older adults.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents had problems with not knowing what services were available and 6 in 10 had problems with feeling like their voice was not heard in the community.
- About one-third reported having problems with finding meaningful volunteer work.

Productive Activities

Productive activities such as traditional and non-traditional forms of work and maintenance of social ties combine with health and personal characteristics to promote quality of life in later life and contribute to active aging.² In the Productive Activities section the extent of older adults’ engagement was examined along with participation in social and leisure programs and their time spent attending or viewing civic meetings, volunteering or providing help to others.

- Over 6 in 10 felt West Central Indiana had “excellent” or “good” volunteer opportunities, but only about one-third participated in some kind of volunteer work.
- About 17% of respondents had used a senior center in their community.
- Half of seniors said that they had at least “minor” problems having interesting social events or activities to attend.
- About 44% of older residents rated the recreation opportunities in the community as “excellent” or “good.”
- Over half of older residents said they were caregivers; respondents averaged between 10 and 12 hours per week providing care for children, adults and older adults.
- About one in five older adults in West Central Indiana felt physically or financially burdened by their caregiving.
- About three-quarters of respondents were fully retired, but 43% of respondents experienced at least minor problems with having enough money to meet daily expenses.
- The value of paid (part- and full-time work) and unpaid (volunteering, providing care) contributions by older adults in West Central Indiana totaled about \$572 million in a 12-month period.

Health and Wellness

Of all the attributes of aging, health poses the greatest risk and the biggest opportunity for communities to ensure the independence and contributions of their aging populations. Health and Wellness, for the purposes of this study, included not only physical and mental health, but issues of independent living and health care.

- Overall, the older adults in northeast Indiana rated aspects of physical health positively. About 6 in 10 respondents felt they were in “excellent” or “good” physical health and about half felt they had “excellent” or “good” fitness opportunities in their communities.
- About 5 in 10 survey respondents reported having problems with maintaining their homes (48% at least a “minor” problem) and maintaining a healthy diet (48%). More respondents reported at least “minor” problems with doing heavy or intense house work (67%) and staying physically fit (65%).

- The most commonly cited mental health issues included feeling bored (47%) and feeling depressed (44%), while the least cited issues included figuring out which medications to take and when (13%) and having friends or family to rely on (25%).
- About 4 in 10 respondents reported at least minor problems with having adequate information or dealing with public programs such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.
- Almost 3 in 10 respondents reported spending time in a hospital and the same number had fallen and injured themselves in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- At least 15% of older adults reported at least minor problems with aspects of independent living, including 36% who reported having problems with performing regular activities, including walking, eating and preparing meals.

Community Design and Land Use

The movement in America towards designing more “livable” communities – those with mixed-use neighborhoods, higher-density development, increased connections, shared community spaces and more human-scale design – will become a necessity for communities to age successfully. Communities that have planned for older adults tend to emphasize access – a community design that facilitates movement and participation.

- Respondents rated the ease of getting to the places they usually have to visit and ease of car travel most positively with about 6 in 10 rating each as “excellent” or “good.”
- About 37% of respondents felt the area had “excellent” or “good” availability of affordable quality housing and variety of housing options.
- Some older adults experienced problems with having safe and affordable transportation available (24%) while others experienced problems with having housing to suit their needs (16%) or having enough food to eat (14%).
- About three-quarters of older residents rated their overall quality of life as “excellent” or “good.”

Community Readiness

Communities that assist older adults to remain or become active community participants provide the requisite opportunities for recreation, transportation, culture, education, communication, social connection, spiritual enrichment and health care. It is not a package mix, so each community must identify what its older adults seek and what the community provides. The judgments of the residents for whom community planning takes place provide the elements of an equation that describes overall community quality in West Central Indiana (Figure 3).

The following section of this report summarizes how older residents view their community as thriving environments for its older adults within the six community dimensions of Overall Community Quality, Community and Belonging, Community Information, Productive Activities, Health and Wellness and Community Design and Land Use.

Further, older adults, more than others, face difficulties with aspects of everyday life. For many older adults these difficulties vastly exceed the minor physical pains or small losses of function that characterize almost everyone's circumstances after a certain age. When individual problems are added together, a group picture emerges that provides a useful description of the entire community of West Central Indiana. Nationally, areas where older adults face the largest share of life's challenges include caregiving, health and mental health, in-home support, nutrition and food security and transportation. This study also explored specific problems or stressors encountered by older adults in West Central Indiana, such as physical and emotional difficulties and injuries that have compromised their independence. Within the five community dimensions of Community and Belonging, Community Information, Productive Activities, Health and Wellness and Community Design and Land Use, the magnitude of these individual-level needs is presented in Figure 4: Older Adult Needs in West Central Indiana by Community Dimension.

Area 7 Agency on Aging and Disabled West Central Indian Economic Development District Opportunities and Challenges

Survey respondents were asked to rate a number of aspects of the community which were converted to an average scale of 0 (the lowest rating, e.g., “poor”) to 100 (the highest rating, e.g., “excellent”) and then combined to provide one overall rating (index¹) for each of the six dimensions of Community Readiness.

Summary scores provide a broad picture of the perceived fit between what West Central Indiana offered to older adults and what older residents needed:

- Older residents felt the areas of Overall Community Quality and Community Design and Land Use best met their needs
- The areas of Community and Belonging and Productive Activities received slightly lower, but good average ratings
- Health and Wellness and Community Information were rated less favorably and received the lowest average ratings

Figure 3: Area 7 Agency on Aging and Disabled West Central Indiana Economic Development District Community Readiness Chart



Scale: 0=Lowest/most negative, 100=Highest/most positive

¹ These ratings are not to be understood like ratings from school tests. Because they are summaries of several questions that range from 0 as “poor,” 33 as “fair,” 66 as “good” and 100 as “excellent”, a score of 58, as one example, should be interpreted as closer to “good” than “fair” (with the midpoint of the scale, 50, representing equidistance between “good” and “fair”).

Older Resident Needs in Area 7 Agency on Aging and Disabled West Central Indiana Economic Development District

Over forty individual survey questions about specific problems faced by older community members, as well as participation levels and community engagement were summarized into 12 larger areas to provide a broad picture of older resident needs in West Central Indiana. Summary scores are based on the average percent of respondents who experienced problems or had low levels of participation and engagement. These 12 areas have been organized into five community dimensions of Community and Belonging, Community Information, Productive Activities, Health and Wellness and Community Design and Land Use (no needs areas have been defined for the community dimension of Overall Community Quality).

Typically, it is understood that the self-reported needs of older adults represent a minimum level, a conservative estimate attenuated by respondents' strong desire to feel and appear self-reliant and further reduced by the silent voice of some older adults who, no matter how sensitive the attempt, are too frail to participate in any survey enterprise. Nonetheless, clear patterns of needs and strengths emerged from this assessment:

- Older residents had the largest needs in the areas of civic engagement and physical health
- A significant portion had needs in the areas of meaningful activities and mental health
- Few reported needs in the areas of safety and caregiver burden

Figure 4: Older Adult Needs in West Central Indiana by Community Dimension

